THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

POLICY REVIEW

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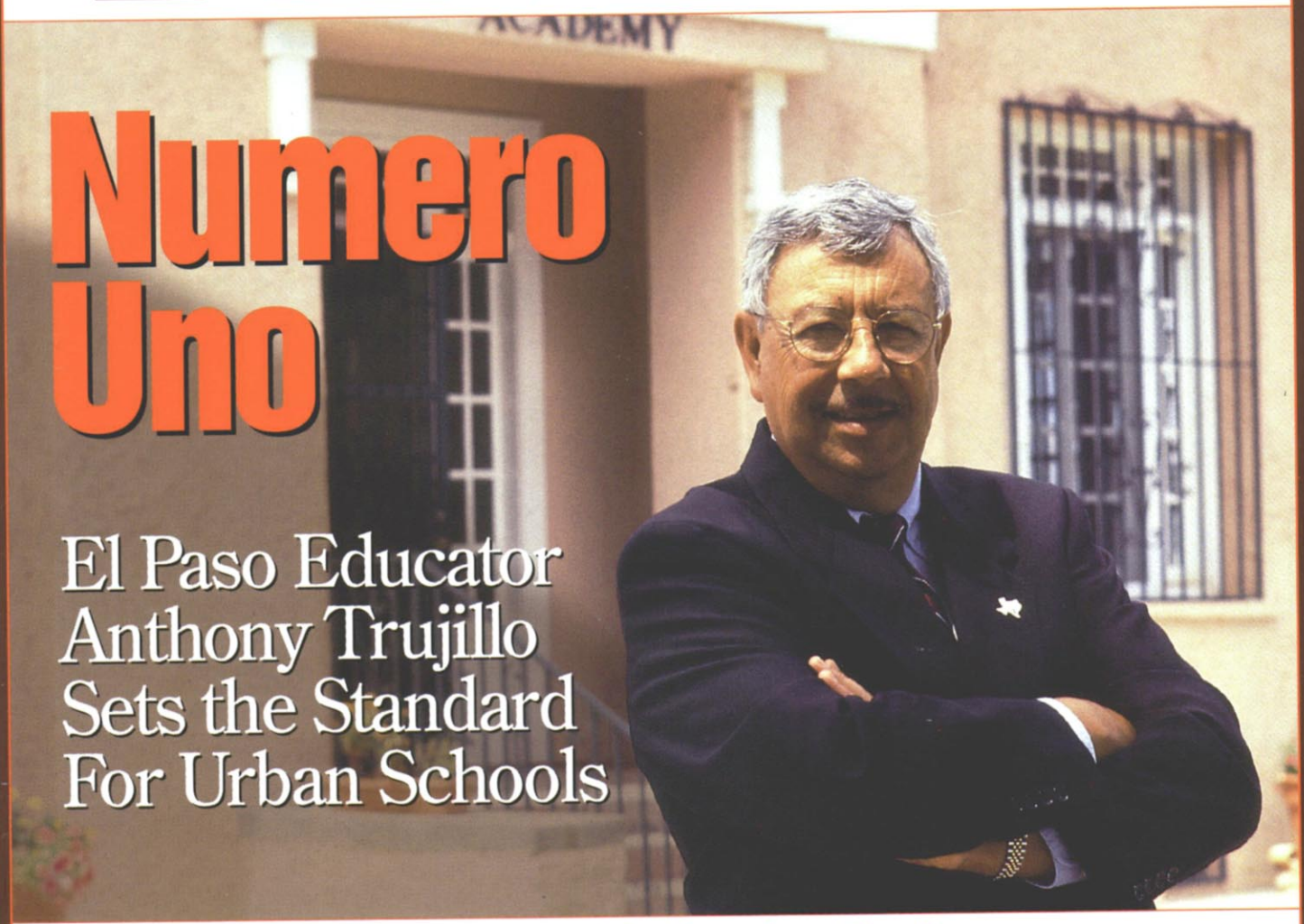

Numero Uno

El Paso Educator Anthony Trujillo Sets the Standard For Urban Schools

The Madness of the American Family
By Midge Decter

Support Your Local Charter School
By Chester E. Finn Jr. and Bruno V. Manno

Civic Renewal or Moral Renewal?
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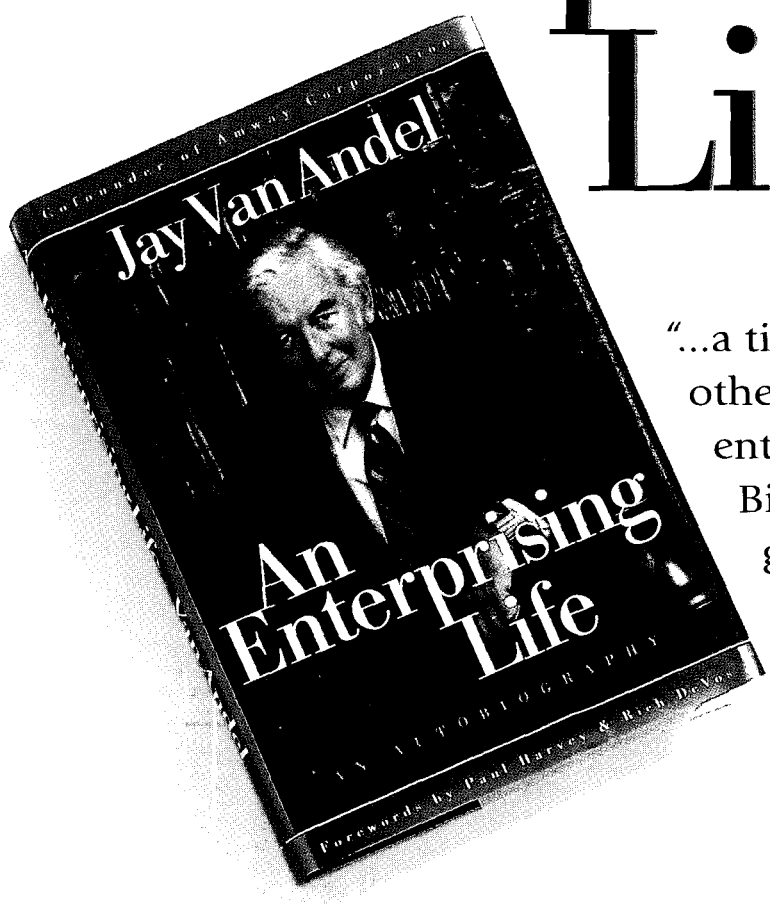

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THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

POLICY REVIEW

September • October 1998 Number 91

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American citizenship combines freedom with responsibility. These are the two great themes of modern conservatism, and they build on the best of the American tradition. Americans come from all races, all nationalities, all religions. Americans are united in citizenship not by common ancestry but by a common commitment to the political principles of the United States: the Constitution, the rule of law, the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Americans are united, too, by the common duties of citizenship: the obligation to protect our country from foreign enemies, to take care of our own families, to participate actively in civic life, to help our neighbors and communities when they are needy, and, in turn, not to take advantage of others' generosity when we can take care of ourselves.

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"I favor the policy of economy, not because I wish to save money, but because I wish to save people. The men and women of this country who toil are the ones who bear the cost of the government. Every dollar we carelessly waste means that their life will be so much the more meager. Every dollar that we prudently save means that their life will be so much the more abundant. Economy is idealism in its most practical form."

—Calvin Coolidge

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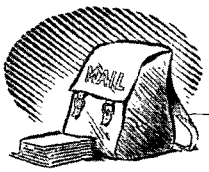

Correspondence

School Vouchers

To the Editor:

Clint Bolick completely ignores one of the most potent arguments against publicly funded school vouchers: It would be a big step down the path of making religion in this country dependent upon government ("Blocking the Exits," May–June 1998).

Such dependency has never been good for the church, regardless of whether government imposes any regulations. Since the time of Constantine, governments that have funded religion have ended up corrupting it. A contemporary example is Western Europe. Evangelical Christianity is almost dead in Western Europe, at least partly the victim of good intentions. European governments thought they were doing something noble when they funded religion, but they weakened the very thing they sought to promote. School vouchers stand squarely in this short-sighted tradition.

This is not a new argument. In more doctrinally precise and less obsessively utilitarian eras, many evangelicals were vigilant defenders of the church's independence and, as such, fought efforts to have the state fund religion. In fact, church-state separation was originally an evangelical idea: It was championed in Virginia by such Christians as Samuel Davies long before the Deist Thomas Jefferson jumped on board. Their arguments carried the day, and evangelical Christianity became stronger here than anywhere else in the West. That very strength is now threatened by such seemingly innocuous proposals as school vouchers and government funding for religious charities.

Timothy Lamer
Alexandria, Va.

To the Editor:

I agree with much of Clint Bolick's reasoning in "Blocking the Exits," but I think the libertarian critics of school vouchers make some important arguments. As with any market-oriented program, there will always be some schools that abuse the system or otherwise earn the scrutiny of the press, especially if the voucher subsidy is inappropriately high, as many voucher proposals seem to be. Then legislators will insist on increasing regulations and restrictions. Even our Arizona education tax credit, which Bolick and the Institute for Justice fought so valiantly to uphold, strikes fear in the hearts of some private schools. The refusal of some Milwaukee private schools to participate in that city's highly regulated voucher program indicates how much these institutions, especially religious ones, fear government subsidies.

For the sake of the kids I say for we must keep the government out of these institutions as much as possible.

If we go the voucher route, I fear ending up with a system of government schools, and very few truly private institutions that have the courage and financial ability to withstand the lure of government funds in order to maintain their integrity and freedom to innovate.

If we cannot win this battle without weakening education's private sector, we will let education establishment take over one remaining chance to save our freedoms and perhaps our very way of life. The stringent academics and, even more importantly, the moral and ethical teachings of private schools may well be the saviors of many inner-city students. Let us not allow the burden of more intrusive government to be another obstacle to their success.

Jack McVaugh
Pres., Arizona School Choice Trust
Scottsdale, Ariz.

Needle Exchanges

To the Editor:

Joe Loconte has done a good job of raising some key issues associated with needle exchanges and substance abuse ("Killing Them Softly," July–Aug. 1998). But your readership should be aware of other data that Loconte may not have reviewed.

This issue has been fraught with subjective conjecture, often lacking some important facts. For example, opponents of needle-exchange programs (NEPs) argue that they allow substance abusers to network and so cause an increase in illicit drug use and HIV susceptibility. I would challenge anyone to provide solid data to support this conjecture. To Loconte's credit, he noted this lack of adequate data. Some critics of NEPs have cited studies from Vancouver and Montreal that were not adequately designed to address those issues. Basic flaws include lack of a comparable control population which does not demonstrate cause and effect.

By contrast, a Johns Hopkins study of Baltimore's NEP has demonstrated a 40 percent reduction in the incidence of HIV infection in subjects using needle exchanges, compared to a control population. (The only difference between the two groups was the use of needle exchanges.) Overall, the incidence of HIV associated with injection drug use fell by 30 percent in the city after needle exchange was instituted, even as it was rising in surrounding counties without needle exchange programs. Similar findings have been demonstrated in New York City.

Every case of AIDS costs society approximately $102,000 per year on average. Almost every intervention strategy is less expensive than the costs of AIDS it prevents. Needle exchange is one of the many pieces in the puzzle to decrease the rate of HIV/AIDS and it may provide an opportunity to educate the worst drug abusers about quitting. We need to objectively assess all of the data and work for the most cost-effective approach, recognizing that such analysis must take into account indirect costs associated with public safety, productivity, and overall health.

Mike Gloth, M.D.
Johns Hopkins University
School of Medicine
Baltimore, Md.

Needles Hurt Blacks

To the Editor:

I heartily endorse Joe Loconte's exposé of needle-exchange programs. Although advocated as an inexpensive way to protect poor drug addicts, many of them black, from infection by HIV, these programs are truly an attack on human life and dignity. We already have 112 NEPs in 29 states, and an unrelenting drive continues for federal funding of this deadly deed.

Proponents of NEPs have no real interest in protecting black people from AIDS. Their agenda is to divert drug policy away from abstinence-based treatment and law enforcement and to legalize drugs, on the theory that the best we can do is to let addicts continue using drugs and reduce the harm they

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do to themselves. This is the mindless new "harm reduction" approach. Conveniently forgotten is the harm to their families and friends and neighbors and anybody else who crosses their path.

Addicts in NEPs are given an identification card that exempts them from arrest for using illegal drugs, but it also exempts the drug dealers who openly sell drugs in the neighborhoods surrounding these programs, which have become disaster areas.

Does this not sound like blacks are being used cynically to further a campaign of extreme civil libertarianism and anarchy in the United States? Is it any surprise that NEP proponents also favor giving heroin on demand to addicts? Does this really seem healthy for liberals or conservatives, blacks or whites? Fortunately, you cannot fool all the people all of the time.

James L. Curtis, M.D.
Director, Department of Psychiatry,
Harlem Hospital
New York, N.Y.

Amen to Independent Colleges

To the Editor:

We say "amen" to John Moore and Grove City College for their principled and persistent avoidance of government aid programs that could compromise their religious mission ("No Strings Attached," May–June 1998). President Moore laments that "very few other" institutions have "duplicate[d] the independent stand taken by us." Well, count us out, too.

Last year, President Mark Coppenger and the trustees of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary decided to discontinue participation in the Stafford student loan program for many of the same religious liberty reasons cited by Grove City College. As one of six seminaries founded by the Southern Baptist Convention, M.B.T.S. is a beneficiary of the generosity of more than 40,000 Southern Baptist churches that subsidize seminary education. It would be a disservice to our new ministers to bury them under a mountain of debt while they pursue a degree.

Michael K. Whitehead
Vice President, Business and Finance
Midwestern Baptist Theol. Seminary
Kansas City, Mo.

Mandatory Discrimination

To the Editor:

Congratulations on the two significant articles on affirmative action in your May–June 1998 issue, "Beyond Quotas" by Roger Clegg and "The New Massive Resistance" by Todd Gaziano.

Now retired from a large California company, I often think of the reverse discrimination I was forced to administer by company personnel officers who, in turn, were responding to federal directives that were clearly unconstitutional. It was in the best interests of the company and my division to seek the best non-management candidates, of any sex, ethnicity, or race, to fill key posts. The three or four most qualified candidates were typically craftspeople who had worked for us for five or more years, did skillful work, had a good attitude and good attendance, and were respected by their other crew members.

Beginning in the late 1960s, however, the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission came after my company to implement "affirmative action" policies. Managers in each division of my company began receiving quarterly analyses of the percentage of each minority occupying each supervisory level, and the number of promotions, broken down by sex and race, that managers needed to achieve by year-end to merit a satisfactory performance evaluation and annual salary raise.

That led many managers to perpetrate such distortions as promoting a member of one racial minority with less experience over another minority with more experience. We were never forced to pick unqualified candidates, but we were not permitted to pick the most qualified candidates if the shortage in a certain ethnic, gender, or racial group was not ameliorated.

I apologize to the hundreds of white, black, Asian, and other qualified people I had to pass over to satisfy this crazy scheme.

Lorne E. O'Brien
Palos Verdes Estates, Calif.

Urban Ills

To the Editor:

Senators Dan Coats and Spencer Abraham might find a more valid cause for the related problems of big government, urban decline, substandard education, poverty and crime ("Liberalism's Mean Streets," Jul–Aug 1998) by borrowing from G.K. Chesterton, who had the humility to observe, "The problem with the world is me."

These very same senators recently voted for the $214-billion federal transportation bill, the most expensive public works bill in American history. Even Bill Clinton called it "fiscally irresponsible." Now they write: "If we are to save [our social fabric] conservatives must offer an alternative to Big Government."

Policy Review readers must wonder how senators Coats and Abraham would define "conservative." Last year, their Republican colleagues sent President Clinton a budget that spends $4 billion more than Clinton requested. The Republican Party continues to support the departments of Commerce, Education and Energy to the tune of $47.6 billion annually. They still fund the NEA, Planned Parenthood, "safe sex" education, condom distribution, needle-exchange programs, and fetal-tissue experimentation.

Senators Coats and Abraham make the problem clear—by their votes on the floor, not by their words—that Big Government and the predicaments it creates will continue to grow as long as we keep pandering and re-electing lawmakers who tax and spend to perpetuate their political careers.

Grant Kuhns
Carlsbad, Calif.

Correction: Due to a production error, the last two lines of "The Tax Revolt Turns 20," by Steven Hayward, in the July–August 1998 issue were inadvertently omitted. The last sentence should have read: "The author of this cogent critique was Daniel H. Pink, a former speechwriter for Vice President Al Gore—a sign, perhaps, that the next tax revolt might be an even more bipartisan affair."

Letters to the Editor

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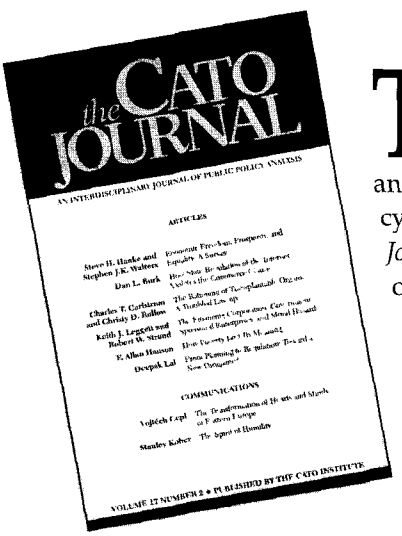
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Higher Standards for Teacher Training

by Eugene W. Hickok

Eugene W. Hickok is the secretary of education for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

No single element is more essential to students' success than excellence in teaching. Fine buildings, equipment, and textbooks are important, but it is the skill and dedication of the teacher that creates a place of learning. So it is both distressing and heartening that incompetence among the ranks of the nation's teachers is finally entering the spotlight. New York's state education department recently discovered that hundreds of its teachers, most of whom have master's degrees, could not pass a standard test in English, math, and reasoning skills. In response to a storm of public criticism, state education officials in Massachusetts recently repealed their decision to lower the qualifying score on a rather basic teacher-licensing exam after 59 percent of the applicants flunked it.

Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge has decided to confront teacher incompetence with a bold new program that focuses on clear, measurable, and rigorous standards for the men and women preparing to be teachers. Indeed, as a result of the Teachers for the 21st Century Initiative, we believe that Pennsylvania's teachers will soon be the most qualified in the nation.

Low Expectations

Before the state enacted these vital changes, it was astonishing how little was expected of prospective teachers, many of whom received undergraduate or master's degrees from one of the state's 91 education programs. When we examined our system of teacher preparation and licensure in 1996, we found a system with limited assurances of competence and quality. We identified six areas of urgent concern:

- Few teacher-education programs had meaningful admission standards. Most undergraduate programs, at best, required prospective majors to have a 2.5 grade point average prior to majoring in education. In other words, the doors were open for C-plus students (or worse) to become teachers. Moreover, that requirement could be fulfilled with the easiest classes.
- Grading standards in teacher-education programs were extremely low. At one public university, 78 percent of students who took courses in "curriculum and foundations" received A's. But on that same campus, only 18 percent of the grades earned in English or physics were A's. A study of 14 state universities showed that the average grade in an education course was a full letter-grade higher than the average for a math course, and one-half grade higher than the average humanities grade.

Pennsylvania's education chief vows to restore luster to his state's teacher-prep programs.

A study by the National Center for Education Statistics confirmed that grade inflation has been far more pronounced in the nation's education departments than in other fields. The average grade in an education course was 3.41, compared with 2.96 in social sciences and 2.67 in science and engineering. We also found that many teacher-preparation programs were increasing the departmental requirements for education courses at the expense of strong preparation in academic subjects.

- Students preparing to be high-school teachers were not required to take the same courses as their peers who majored in academic subjects such as history or science. Mathematics majors, for example, have to complete courses in differential equations and advanced calculus, while education majors planning to teach high-school mathematics—including advanced-placement classes—could substitute a course in the history of mathematics for these rigorous courses. In Pennsylvania, we discovered that some candidates certified in foreign languages were unable to engage in basic conversations in the languages they were purportedly trained to teach.
- Many teacher-preparation programs had no meaningful standards for achievement in the academic content areas their candidates intended to teach.
- Even in nonacademic coursework, such as classroom management and professional skills, which these programs tend to emphasize, few departments had sufficient benchmarks to assess the progress of aspiring teachers.
- Passing scores on national standardized tests for teacher certification (the National Teachers Exam or Praxis exam) were set absurdly low. Although the questions are hardly difficult, Pennsylvania, like most other states, certified teaching candidates who scored in the bottom 10 percent on some of these tests.

In short, our education colleges were enrolling students with grade point averages of C-plus or lower, and the state was certifying teachers who earned the equivalent of an F on their licensure exams. This must never happen again. Governor Ridge's initiative, which was approved by the Pennsylvania state board of education last March, insists that teachers model academic accomplishment. Only a teacher who has achieved excellence can drive students to excel.

A New Standard

In order to receive accreditation by the state, a college of education will have to abide by the following standards:

Admissions. Pennsylvania will require that candidates for teacher-training programs complete the equivalent

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of at least three full semesters of college-level liberal arts courses with a B average before enrolling in a teacher-training program. This requirement is based on college course work exclusive of education courses. When we examined the problem of grade inflation, we determined that colleges and universities would maintain rigorous standards for their education students as long as the entrance requirements are grounded in the arts and sciences that are the core of all further study.

Curricular requirements. Prospective high-school teachers must fulfill the same course requirements as their classmates seeking a B.A. or B.S. in a particular academic discipline. This requires would-be teachers to develop a serious scholarly commitment to and expertise in the subjects they will teach. For example, a science teacher who has personally conducted laboratory research and who has personally pursued scientific inquiry is better equipped to guide students in creative and innovative work in science and technology. No amount of training in teaching methodology can substitute for real intellectual maturation in an academic area. Finally, the prospective teacher must maintain at least a B average in the subject area he or she intends to teach.

The new standards also require education students to acquire classroom experience at the very beginning of their training. We hope this will give them a sense of whether they have the commitment and temperament for teaching, as well as an opportunity for applying their academic training to the classrooms they will one day lead.

Finally, we have required colleges of education to ensure that education majors can complete a teacher-preparation program as well as their requirements in an academic subject in four years, like other baccalaureate students. Some education programs have expanded to five years as their course requirements in methodology have proliferated. This may be good for the job security of education professors, but it is an unethical misuse of taxpayers' funds and student tuition.

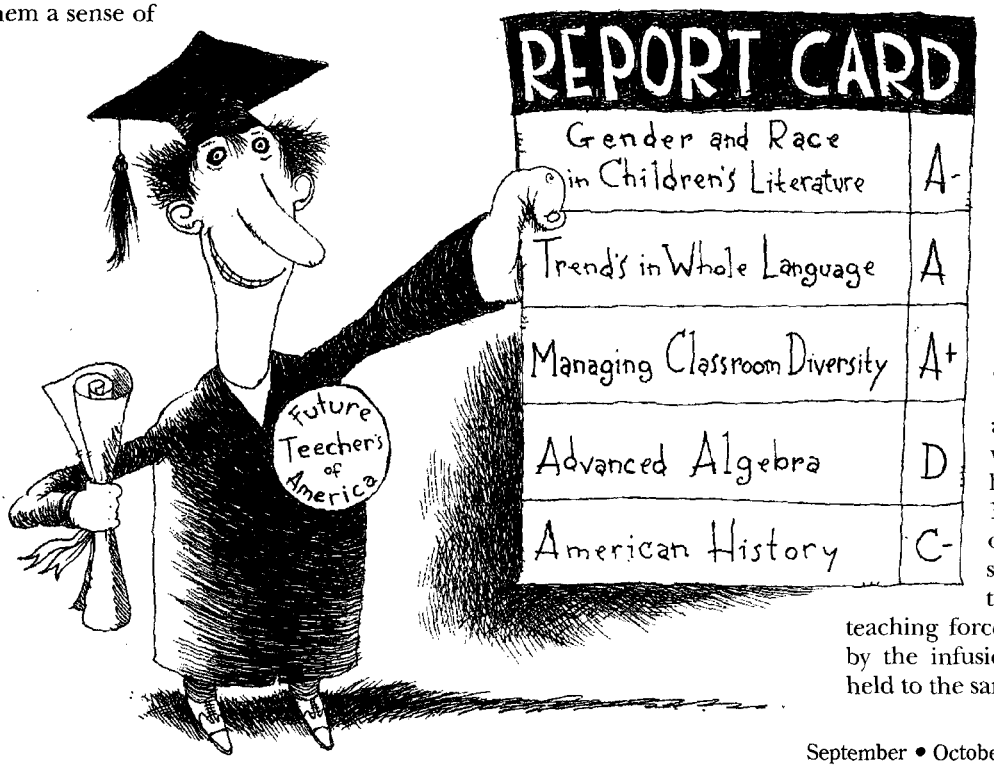
Qualifying test scores. We have begun to lift the minimum qualifying scores on licensing exams gradually from the bottom quintile or decile of test takers, depending on the subject area, to scores that approach the national average. Before 1997, candidates could pass the Professional Knowledge Test with a score in the 5th percentile of test takers; now the passing score represents the 28th percentile. We have also raised the threshold for the mathematics exam from the 16th percentile to the 37th, and from the 16th percentile to the 42nd in biology. No longer will the state certify teachers who miss half or more of the questions.

Alternative certification. One size does not fit all in the preparation of teachers. We are creating guidelines by which those who have completed their undergraduate or graduate education with distinction and have passed the appropriate licensing exams will be permitted to enter teaching-apprenticeship programs at eligible public schools. Other states have already found that this type of program bolsters their teaching force by allowing uniquely qualified individuals to contribute to their public schools. In fact, some studies even show that teachers who gained alternative certification were more skilled than their traditionally licensed counterparts. Detractors claim that these programs allow unqualified persons to enter the profession, but research shows that they actually are windows of opportunity for those with special expertise and a commitment to improve schools.

The Money Trap

The National Education Association has declared its objective to make licensure "a process controlled by the profession." It is clear to us that the profession has been doing little to ensure that new teachers have the knowledge base they need and much to ensure that colleges of education could expand their control of the preparation of public-school teachers. Although per-pupil expenditures in the United States are among the highest in the world, most reform efforts still assume that only more money will help our children. National and international studies, however, show that our high expenditures and intense focus on educational theory have not served us well where it matters: the academic performance of our schoolchildren.

President Clinton's answer to our classroom woes is another high-cost, low-yield fix: funding 100,000 new teachers in order to lower classroom size. This is misguided for two reasons. First, the teaching force will not be invigorated by the infusion of yet more teachers held to the same mediocre standards in



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Stephen V. Monsma
and
J. Christopher Soper
editors

Equal Treatment of Religion in a Pluralistic Society

Few areas of public policy in the United States are as politically contentious and legally confusing as church-state relations. The traditional approach to these issues, rooted in a strict separation of church and state, is being drawn into question today by increasing levels of religious pluralism. This timely book provides the first comprehensive analysis of a new paradigm for discussing church-state relations — equal treatment, also sometimes referred to as neutrality — that has growing popularity in Congress and has recently been used in several Supreme Court rulings. Eight leading scholars of constitutional law and political science here trace the development of equal treatment theory, consider its implications for public policy and church-state relations, and evaluate it from a number of ideological perspectives.

CONTRIBUTORS: Derek H. Davis, Robert A. Destro, Carl H. Esbeck, Charles L. Glenn, Gregg Ivers, Michael W. McConnell, James W. Skillen, and Rogers M. Smith.

"This volume presents a carefully reasoned and balanced scholarly response to the virtual exclusion of religion from many aspects of American life. Within a context of constitutional rigor and social civility, the authors map paths to constructive remedies."
—A. JAMES REICHLEY

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subject knowledge. Second, there is no evidence that smaller classes by themselves have more than a marginal effect on student performance. A growing body of research, on the other hand, validates what common sense tells us: Teachers with better academic preparation and skills are more effective, and their pupils perform better. A 1991 Texas study by Ronald Ferguson showed that student achievement had a positive correlation to the performance of teachers on a statewide standardized test, and a recent study by Daniel Goldhaber and Dominic Brewer of high-school math teachers, published last summer in the *Journal of Human Resources*, demonstrated a strong connection between the teachers' preparation in their subject area and their students' achievement test scores. Says Eric Hanushek, an economist and education expert at the University of Rochester, "The only reasonably consistent finding seems to be that smarter teachers do better in terms of student achievement."

The Cost of Quality

Some skeptics may object that states already facing teacher shortages (Pennsylvania is not among them) cannot afford to raise the qualifying standards for the profession. But we will never be able to place a qualified teacher in every classroom by pretending that quality does not matter. Rather than recruiting the mediocre by lowering standards, states need to make teaching in the public schools a prestigious career open to only the best qualified. Moreover, public schools can use alternative certification to draw upon a large group of eager professionals—many with advanced degrees—who wish to serve in public education. Experience shows that this talent pool includes highly skilled post-doctoral students, scientists, and adjunct college faculty keen to share their expertise.

Under the leadership of Governor Ridge, Pennsylvania's new standards require objective criteria for admission, curriculum, and academic achievement in teacher preparation. We are firmly convinced that the dynamic new teachers who will emerge from these stronger schools of education, augmented by a carefully designed alternative-certification program, will justify this effort. We owe our children and our nation no less.

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When the Public Trust Runs off the Rails

by Wally Nunn

Wally Nunn, a managing director at Salomon Smith Barney in Philadelphia, is an appointed member of SEPTA's board of directors and a Delaware County (Pa.) councilman.

In any conflict between an entrenched government bureaucracy and the public officials who oversee it, the bureaucracy usually has the upper hand. The most powerful weapon available to the overseers is unfettered access to accurate, objective, and independent information. This point was driven home to me last year in my role as a member of the board of directors of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (better known as SEPTA), the mass transit system for the Philadelphia area and the nation's fourth-largest transit authority.

Two years ago, SEPTA's management was pleading poverty and claiming it could not continue to operate without increased funding. Management told the board that, without a major infusion of taxpayer dollars, it would have no alternative but to cut service and raise fares. Instead of taking the managers' word for it, as governing boards often do, I led an effort to learn the truth about SEPTA's finances and operations. The ensuing struggle was contentious and exhausting, but ultimately we began to restore SEPTA's operational and fiscal foundation. This year, SEPTA realized its first budget surplus in memory, without raising fares or cutting service.

What's Wrong with This Picture?

My education began in the spring of 1997, as I sat at my desk trying to reconcile two apparently contradictory documents. In one hand, I held a report summarizing an audit recently commissioned by SEPTA's management. The report, written by a Big Six accounting firm, essentially assured us that SEPTA was managed soundly.

In my other hand, I held a report from SEPTA's management itself, advising us that the transit authority was confronting a $75-million shortfall in its $700-million-plus budget. Upon investigation, I soon learned that SEPTA's ridership had declined nearly 11 percent in the past decade while its work force had expanded by 20 percent and its unit labor costs had jumped by 121 percent. And yet the Big Six report continued to maintain that all was copacetic. How could this be?

The public officials who keep watch over bureaucracy need every weapon they can get—especially information.

It gradually became clear that the management had a stake in perpetuating this bifurcated view of its operations. Its alarming claims of a deficit would justify higher subsidies, which would in turn expand the agency's budget and mask its fiscal problems. At the same time, a clean bill of health from the auditors would deflect probing questions about whether management was doing a good job.

At this crucial juncture, I realized that the board needed a better understanding of how money was being spent. In an effort to get our arms around the financial, operational, and management issues confronting SEPTA, we broke from standard practice and turned to outsiders for a disinterested assessment.

The Light Goes On

Despite much resistance from SEPTA's senior managers, the board commissioned a second report. It was prepared by an independent, regional management consulting firm named Phoenix Management Services that was experienced in advising troubled private firms and had no previous ties to SEPTA. Its report painted a vastly different picture. According to Phoenix, SEPTA's malady was a spending problem, not a funding problem. In 330 well-researched and well-documented pages, Phoenix pointed out countless examples of poor management, inefficient operations, and wasted dollars. In all, the firm identified potential costs savings of at least $150 million a year.

In fact, the Phoenix report was at odds with most of the original audit. For example, consider the following claims made by SEPTA to justify higher subsidies and corroborated by the Big Six firm's report, contrasted with the facts unearthed by Phoenix:

Subsidies in 1997. SEPTA claimed its operating subsidies had been cut significantly for fiscal year 1997, precipitating the budget crisis. In fact, SEPTA's total operating subsidies in 1997 from all sources *increased* by $9 million, from about $420 million to about $429 million.

Comparative subsidy support. SEPTA claimed that Pennsylvania's operating subsidies had declined or had grown more slowly than state support given to major transit systems elsewhere in the nation. In dollar terms, Pennsylvania's subsidies to SEPTA increased by 43 percent over the five-year period, and increased 59 percent on a per-ride basis. By comparison, the 14 major transit systems evaluated enjoyed average increases in those areas of only 34 percent and 54 percent, respectively. Clearly, dwindling subsidies were not the fiscal albatross SEPTA wanted the public to believe.

Rising fares. According to SEPTA, its fares had risen more rapidly than those of other, comparable transit agencies. In fact, just the opposite was true. The rate of growth in SEPTA's fare revenue per trip was second lowest among 10 major-city agencies examined by Phoenix. Of course, the board had no desire to raise fares, but recognized this false claim as part of SEPTA's strategy for justifying higher subsidies.

The board unanimously endorsed the Phoenix report. Armed with accurate and damning information, it then forced a change in top management. With the report as a guidebook, we identified about 1,200 positions—half of them in the managerial bureaucra-

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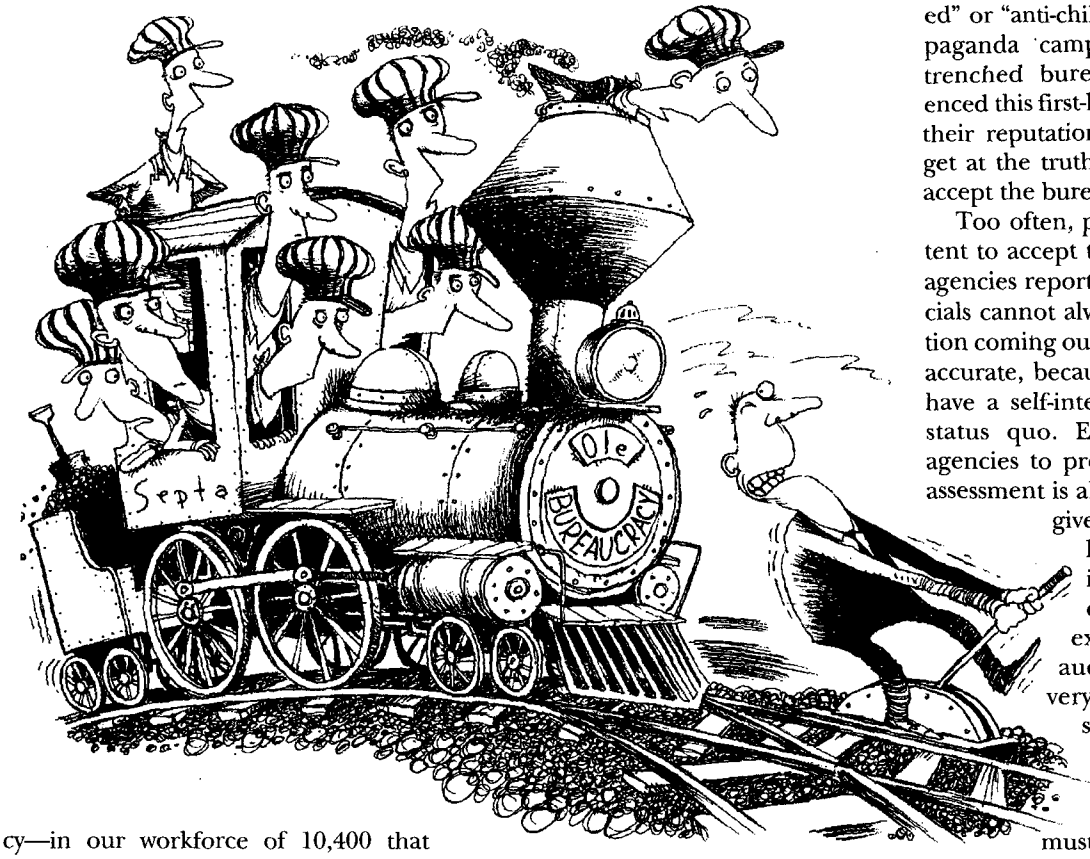

Illustration by David Clark

cy—in our workforce of 10,400 that were not productive and eliminated them. That step alone is saving us about $60 million to $70 million a year. I would estimate another 500 positions or so could meet the same fate over the next year or two.

Similarly, the Phoenix report helped us identify numerous wasteful financial and operating practices to be targeted in SEPTA's labor contract negotiations. For example, under some of our collective bargaining agreements, workers get paid for 44-hour weeks while on vacation, even though most workers work 40-hour weeks. SEPTA faces absurd restrictions on using part-time union employees for part-time assignments. Our workman's compensation expenses are more than twice as high (in proportion to the work force) as those for Philadelphia city workers. Some employees effectively get lifetime tenure after one year on the job, and some earn overtime for working more than eight hours in a day, even if they work fewer than 40 hours that week.

Had the board not taken the step of commissioning an independent, objective assessment of the transit authority's operations, SEPTA would still be mired in a financial and operational morass and accumulating deficits as far as the eye can see. Instead, after just one year, SEPTA enjoys a modest budget surplus while holding fares constant and improving service. We are therefore in a better fiscal position to attract new riders and shore up our aging infrastructure, which may require several billion dollars in the next few years.

A Lesson for Elected Officials

Many bureaucrats practice a refined art of systematically and deliberately misleading the public—and those appointed or elected to oversee them—in order to retain control of their organization. They have become masters of misinformation, adroitly obfuscating matters and adding so much complexity to the task of public oversight that few outsiders can figure out what is really going on.

These conspiracies of self-preservation sometimes enlist the support of the public and the media. Any public official who presses for more detailed information about the internal goings-on of these institutions is publicly attacked or privately marginalized. Liberal journalists who favor the agenda of bigger government go along with this. For example, a county commissioner who questions the finances of a school district might be branded "mean-spirited" or "anti-children" as part of a propaganda campaign waged by entrenched bureaucrats. (I've experienced this first-hand.) Unwilling to risk their reputations and unsure how to get at the truth, many officials simply accept the bureaucracy's propaganda.

Too often, public officials are content to accept the party line from the agencies reporting to them. Such officials cannot always count on information coming out of a bureaucracy to be accurate, because most bureaucracies have a self-interest in upholding the status quo. Expecting government agencies to provide an objective self-assessment is akin to asking the fox to give an honest report on how many hens remain in the hen-house. It is equally unreasonable to expect that an outside auditor selected by the very bureaucracy under scrutiny will produce a review unpalatable to the client.

Instead, officials must create their own channels of objective information on the agencies they oversee. To do so, they must enlist outside evaluators with no previous ties to the agency and secure unrestricted access to the necessary operational and financial data. Such access and independent reviews of management are standard practice in the private sector.

Bill Bratton, the former police commissioner of New York City, illustrated this lesson beautifully in the early 1990s. Bratton instituted a computerized database that allowed him to track crime block-by-block and thus hold precinct commanders accountable for failure.

The crime initiative in New York City and the turnaround of Philadelphia's transit authority are but two examples of a fresh approach to governing. A new breed of public officials is recognizing that they must seize control of the information process and enlist outside help that has no allegiance to the agency under scrutiny. The only way officials can accomplish this is through direct access to all essential information, backed by the political will to undertake independent and mandatory reviews. Anything less would be a violation of our duty as stewards of the public trust.

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The State of the States

Welfare Reform Update

California, a laggard in welfare reform, has experienced a 12.2 percent drop in its welfare caseload over the last 10 months. The rolls shrank by more than 100,000 people in that time, saving taxpayers more than $600 million this year. All 58 California counties experienced in a drop in their caseloads, but one-third of the reduction occurred in Los Angeles County.

Meanwhile, a General Accounting Office study of seven states (**California**, **Connecticut**, **Louisiana**, **Maryland**, **Oregon**, **Texas**, and **Wisconsin**) found that most people leaving the welfare rolls had found employment. A Manpower Demonstration Research Corp. study of **Oregon**'s "work first" program, which emphasizes immediate job placement, found that it has achieved more substantial results than programs that emphasize job training and other half-measures. The MDRC report, which studied comparable groups of welfare recipients, found that "work first" participants found more jobs at higher wages than did a control group.

Finally, the Urban Institute has issued an upbeat report on the progress of welfare reform. Among other findings, the report concluded that parents who worked even part time at the minimum wage enjoyed higher family incomes than if they had stayed on welfare. Another finding: Most government incentive programs to hire welfare recipients are "irrelevant" to employers. "The pace of welfare reform has far exceeded our expectations," said **Ohio** governor George Voinovich, the chairman of the National Governors Association.

The Banana Republic State?

Every state in the union has experienced a decline in their welfare caseload over the last five years—except **Hawaii**. Hawaii's welfare caseload has risen nearly 7 percent during this period. This is merely one sign of the malaise afflicting the state's economy. While the nation as a whole has been enjoying steady growth of about 2.5 percent a year, Hawaii's economy has been growing by an anemic 0.5 percent annually, and some forecasters predict zero growth this year. Unemployment has doubled since 1990, and the state faces the only state budget deficit in the country right now, to the tune of $140 million. Hawaii is reaping the bitter harvest of high taxes, overregulation, and employment laws that throttle private-sector hiring. Hawaii ranked last among the 50 states in the Small Business Survival Committee's survey of business friendliness. Public employees, meanwhile, have blocked all attempts to reduce costs through privatization.

Friends of Brownfields

The crusade to turn environmental regulation into a civil rights issue through "environmental justice" is running into trouble: The U.S. Conference of Mayors recently passed a resolution attacking new rules from the Environmental Protection Agency that would prevent siting of any polluting facility in low-income neighborhoods. Such rules, the mayors' group complained, would undermine the administration's policies for "encouraging urban revitalization, retention of existing businesses, and brownfield redevelopment."

The resolution was drafted by Detroit mayor Dennis Archer. Seventeen states have also made official protests against the EPA policy. One prominent complainer: **Colorado** governor Roy Romer, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

Not So Fast, Mr. President

Unnoticed by most of Washington, President Clinton quietly issued an executive order during his European trip in May affecting state-federal relations. The order repealed several policies President Reagan had issued in his own executive order on federalism in 1987, including the requirement that regulatory agencies identify and analyze the effect that new regulations would have on state and local governments, and a requirement that statutes have express provisions for pre-empting state law before pre-emptive regulations can be issued.

The vague and legalistic wording of the order will allow backdoor attempts to evade Congress's ban on unfunded mandates. Indiana congressman David McIntosh's staff happened to notice the order in the Federal Register and blew the whistle. State and local groups, including the National Governors Association, the National League of Cities, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, have protested strongly to the White House. The White House counsel's office says implementation of the order will be delayed. Stay tuned.

Bilingual Loophole

A loophole in **California**'s Proposition 227 may allow bilingual education to live on. California's recently expanded charter-school law exempts charter schools from the entire state education code. Since Prop 227 is part of the education code, charter schools can ignore its provisions if they wish. Prop 227 sponsor Ron Unz is unfazed: No one can be compelled to attend a charter school.

Et Cetera

The combined surplus of all 50 state budgets, according to latest estimates, will top $24 billion. . . . The Edison Project has announced that it will add 23 more schools, bringing the total number of schools it operates to 48, covering 23,000 students in 25 cities. . . . The U.S. Department of Education is bullying the city of Denver, which hoped to emulate California's Proposition 227 and reform bilingual education. Denver proposed, among other measures, a three-year time limit for each student in bilingual classes. The department is threatening to cut off $30 million in federal funds if Denver does not relent. . . . **New Jersey** governor Christine Todd Whitman has angered conservatives again with a plan to hike the gasoline tax by $344 million and the cigarette tax by $205 million. But for the moment, Democrats in the legislature are blocking the plan (which requires voter approval in November), because part of Whitman's plan includes the privatization of more than 600 state jobs.

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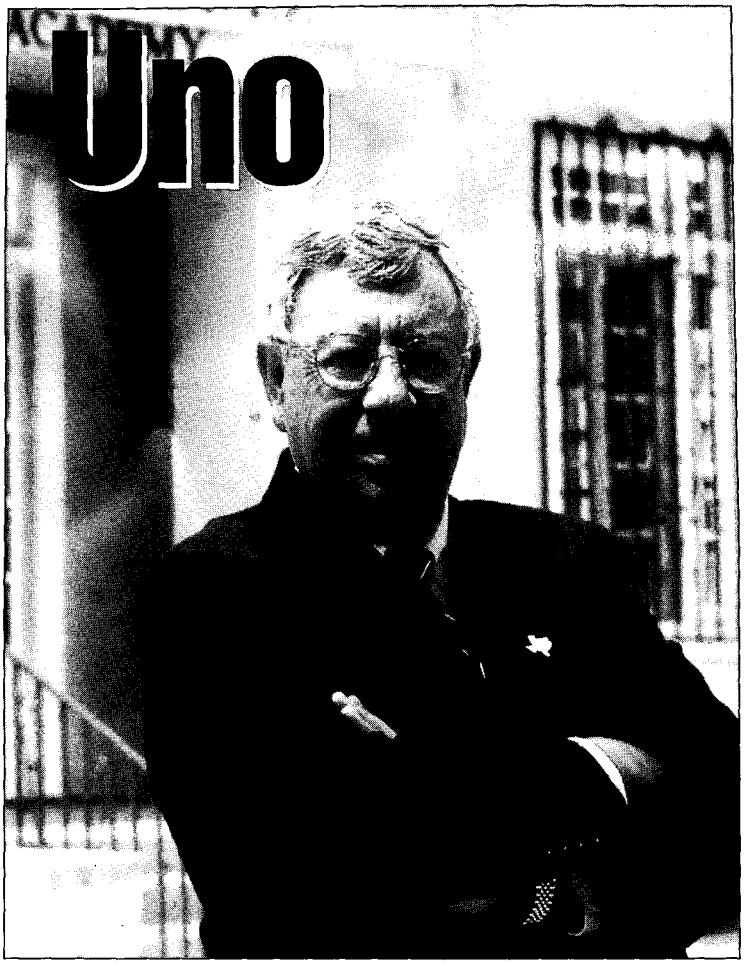

El Paso superintendent Anthony Trujillo sets the standard for urban schools

By Tyce Palmaffy

One of America's finest public-school superintendents is probably about to lose his job.

In his six years at the helm of the Ysleta School District in El Paso, Texas, Anthony Trujillo has built Ysleta into the highest-performing urban school district in the state, as measured by standardized tests. He has reversed years of declining enrollment, as families living outside the district now choose to send 2,000 children to Ysleta's 57 schools. And he has electrified teachers, principals, and parents in the district with his mission statement: "All students who enroll in our schools will graduate fluently bilingual and prepared to enter a four-year college or university."

Praise for Ysleta's turnaround has come from diverse sources, to say the least. Conservative House Speaker Newt Gingrich has said that Trujillo "may be the wisest education reformer I have met in my 55 years." Last year, the district won an annual award from the National Association for Bilingual Education for its "commitment to academic excellence through bilingual education." In December, the left-leaning *Sacramento Bee* editorialized, "[I]t would be hard for anybody in Sacramento, or any other struggling urban district, to argue against the principles that make the Ysleta example so compelling—standards, accountability and a demonstrated belief that school systems are run for the benefit of children, not the people who work in them."

And what is Trujillo's reward for his performance? The Ysleta school board is so eager to replace him that it is considering whether to offer him a lucrative buyout from his five-year contract, which ends in 2001. "The attempt to get rid of the superintendent, I believe, is nothing other than a

Photo by Frank Muñoz

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personal vendetta," says Carlos Sandoval, a current member and past school board president. "I don't believe it's based on his performance." Board members have rightly criticized Trujillo for his lack of progress in boosting high-school performance. The district's Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores continue to lag more than 100 points behind the state average. But they have ignored his extraordinary progress in boosting elementary-school and middle-school achievement.

Indeed, Ysleta has set the pace for test-score improvements in Texas, which in turn has set the pace for the nation. (See "The Gold Star State," *Policy Review*, March-April 1998, for an explanation of Texas's surging scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress.) Under a rigorous accountability system introduced in 1993, all Texas students in grades three through eight and grade 10 take Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) tests in reading, math, and writing. The state then assigns each school and district one of four rankings—"low performing," "acceptable," "recognized," or "exemplary"—based on the proportion of students passing the TAAS, as well as dropout and attendance rates. To ensure equity, a school's rating will only be as high as warranted by the scores of its worst-performing demographic subgroup. For instance, a school where 90 percent of the students passed the TAAS would merit an "exemplary" rating. But if, say, only 70 percent of its Hispanic students passed the TAAS, the school's rating would drop to "acceptable."

In 1994, two years after Trujillo took over, Ysleta had one "recognized" school and no "exemplary" schools. This year, 11 were rated "exemplary" and 33 "recognized." In 1993, there were seven "low-performing" schools; now there are none. The underlying improvement in students' test scores was dramatic: From 1993 to 1998, the percentage of Ysleta students who passed the state reading tests rose from 63 to 89 percent. In math, the percentage jumped from 41 to 86. Moreover, the achievement gap between Ysleta's whites and Hispanics has been slashed by two-thirds.

And this year, Ysleta became the first of Texas's eight largest school districts to achieve "recognized" status. That means at least 80 percent of Ysleta students overall and 80 percent or more of the students in each of five subgroups—black, Hispanic, white, Asian, and economically disadvantaged—passed the TAAS. This is even more impressive when one considers that Ysleta uses the "special education" label to exempt only 2 percent of its students (usually low performers) from the TAAS, versus 6 percent statewide, 8 percent in Dallas, 10 percent in Houston, and 11 percent in Fort Worth.

What is more, Ysleta serves the poorer, eastern half of El Paso, in one of the nation's poorest congressional districts. It faces all of the challenges that plague an urban district—dense concentrations of poverty, the lure of drugs and gang life, high rates of crime and teenage pregnancy—plus the consequences of its geography. Nestled in the dusty, westernmost corner of Texas, the district sits just across the Rio Grande from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, guaranteeing a steady inflow of immigrant children and parents who hardly speak English.

Forty percent of Ysleta's students enter school with "limited English proficiency" (LEP), and its student population of 47,000 is nearly 90 percent Hispanic in a state where only 62 percent of Hispanics recently passed all three TAAS tests (versus 85 percent of whites).

Ysleta could use this gap as well as its overwhelming immigrant population as excuses for poor performance. But the district needs no excuses: The same percentage of Ysleta's Hispanic children passed all three TAAS tests as did Texas children overall. And Ysleta exempts a mere 2 percent of its students due to limited English skills (in addition to the 2 percent labeled "special ed"). Meanwhile, Trujillo has achieved this performance while cutting average spending per student by $200. The district now spends $4,900 per student, $400 below the state average of $5,300 per pupil.

It takes the talents and hard work of some 4,000 teachers and administrators to create a district like Ysleta. But what separates Ysleta from other districts full of talented staff is the environment within which Ysleta's educators toil. They enjoy leadership that gives schools the resources and freedom they need; incentives that encourage healthy competition among schools; a concrete, commonly understood mission and set of goals; the ability to customize a child's education using test data and computers; a bilingual-education program that actually succeeds in teaching students English; and a districtwide conviction that the schools are responsible for the well-being of every child and the entire community.

Despite high poverty and a constant inflow of immigrants with limited English skills, Ysleta has the best test scores of any urban district in Texas.

"This place is going to change the world," says Lawrence Lezotte, an education professor at Michigan State University and the head of Effective Schools, an educational consulting firm.

The Overhaul

It was not always so in Ysleta. When Trujillo was hired in February 1992, school buildings were crumbling from neglect, morale was low, and the

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district was still run much the same as it was during the record 50-year tenure of a former superintendent who had retired in 1980. Conditions were so alarming that the state education agency had assigned a monitor to watch over the district and had even considered a state takeover.

Desperate to retain local control, the Ysleta school board lured Trujillo out of retirement on the strength of the national reputation he had earned during a successful but turbulent 35-year career in California schools. His most recent employer, the Sweetwater Union High School District, near San Diego, California, paid him a hefty severance to leave early despite the district's widely acknowledged improvement during his time as superintendent. (In 1989, a teacher and former union official had leveled charges of corruption against Trujillo's administration. Although a grand jury and a state auditor found no evidence of wrongdoing, the accusations tarnished Trujillo's image.)

Trujillo's leadership style has been no less controversial in El Paso. During his six years in the district, Ysleta has been racked by bitter public infighting among board members, much of it waged between those who support Trujillo and those who would prefer to see him go. Several board members have criticized him for focusing too much on TAAS scores to the exclusion of other skills, but the main disagreement seems to be over whether Trujillo or the board ought to manage the district. His critics on the board have proposed to establish personnel and finance committees that would approve job candidates and control the bidding process for district contracts, thus limiting Trujillo's ability to determine spending priorities and form his own team of administrators and school leaders. "He doesn't want to have anybody tell him what to do," says Charles Peartree, the school board's secretary. "If he would mind his p's and q's and work with the board, then I would have no problem with him staying on."

It is not hard to see why the current board feels impotent. The board that hired Trujillo gave him wide latitude to run the district as he saw fit, even amending his contract to hand the board's authority to hire and fire over to him (a power the current board sued unsuccessfully to take back).

It was this latitude, though, that would prove crucial in establishing firm and enforceable expectations for Ysleta's principals and teachers. In his first meeting with the district's principals, he noted they had all received satisfactory evaluations while the students continued to fail, and said, "This is the strangest district I've ever been in. It has the dumbest students and the brightest adults." His solution to this apparent contradiction did not go over well: They all received one-year contracts, not the three-year renewals they had expected. He soon placed all new teachers on one-year contracts, as well.

In the five years since then, 32 of 51 principals have left the district or retired, as have 2,000 of 3,000 teachers (twice the previous turnover rate of 200 teachers a year). Trujillo also shuffled the remaining principals around the district to find good fits among the school leadership, the staff, and the surrounding community; within two years, only two of the district's seven high-school principals remained at their original schools. (In most states, union rules block superintendents from making such sweeping moves; Texas education unions have no collective-bargaining rights.) The one-year contracts gave Trujillo added flexibility in laying off principals who failed to meet his expectations, but in the end the threat was more important than any action—no principals have actually been fired. Now principals whose schools are "recognized" or "exemplary" for two years are awarded multi-year contracts, and those principals may recommend members of their staffs for similar pacts.

More drastic steps were taken at Bel Air High. Though its test scores were good enough for an

The Best Little District in Texas

Like all urban school districts in Texas, Ysleta has a large immigrant population (at any one time, 22 percent of its students have limited English skills, versus 13 percent statewide) and dense concentrations of poverty (68 percent are economically disadvantaged, versus 48 percent statewide). Yet Ysleta students pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) at far higher rates than their peers among the state's eight largest school districts—and even beat the statewide pass rates. Below are the percentages of students in the "Big 8" and statewide, in three ethnic and racial categories, who passed all three of the state's basic-skills tests in 1997. All three groups in Ysleta topped 80 percent in 1998.

	% of students passing TAAS			Per-pupil
District	**Whites**	**Blacks**	**Hispanics**	**spending**
Austin	85	44	51	$5,137
Corpus Christi	85	58	64	$4,942
Dallas	78	49	54	$5,179
El Paso	84	60	60	$5,013
Fort Worth	82	44	49	$5,053
Houston	90	60	58	$5,226
San Antonio	69	41	49	$5,663
Ysleta	**84**	**69**	**72**	**$4,885**
TEXAS	85	56	62	$5,282

Source: Texas Education Agency

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"acceptable" rating, Ysleta officials concluded that the culture of low expectations ran so deep at the school that fresh blood was needed. So they "reconstituted" Bel Air, meaning the entire staff was asked to reapply. Fewer than 50 percent were rehired. Trujillo points to the reconstitution as a signal event in Ysleta's comeback. "That sent a shock wave through the system," he says. "It showed that I was dead serious about getting results."

He next established an "open enrollment" policy under which students were allowed to transfer to any district school that had room. More importantly, the district also changed its budgeting policy so that when a student changes schools, his per-pupil funding follows him: High schools receive $4,200 per student, middle schools $4,400, and elementary schools $3,800, with additional funding for special education and LEP students. Principals must now retain and attract children or else watch the money walk away. The district estimates that 3,000 of Ysleta's 47,000 students switched schools in the first year of this public-school "choice" plan.

Imposing such vigorous competition on principals who, as in most districts nationwide, did not even wield the power to hire their own staffs would have been unfair. So Trujillo gave principals broad discretion in running their schools. "They pretty much let us operate our campuses," says Frank Burton, the principal of Hillcrest Middle School. "If we need help, they provide it. If we don't, they leave us alone. [Trujillo] lets you do your job." In turn, the state's accountability system gave the district the tools to set clear, meaningful goals and to measure performance and progress.

A Magnet for Others

More recently, Ysleta was able to capitalize on a clause in the Texas education code that allows districts to open their doors to students from neighboring districts. In 1993, the state responded to a court order to equalize school funding throughout Texas by raising the state's subsidies to poor districts. The state now funds 50 percent or more of every school district's budget (nearly 70 percent in Ysleta's case), and the amount of state aid is based on a district's average daily attendance, no matter where the kids come from. Last year, 2,000 nonresident children streamed into Ysleta schools, reversing years of declining enrollment and bringing millions of dollars in state aid (roughly $3,800 per student) with them.

This has enabled Trujillo to spend nearly $20 million a year on school renovation, technology upgrades, and other capital improvements. He has targeted most of this funding into the schools south of Interstate 10, which for years has been the dividing line between the haves and have-nots. Those south of the highway suffered from decades of neglect, mainly because the residents living north of the highway were wealthier and spoke better English.

Trujillo shook up central administration as well, changing its culture from one of oversight to one of customer service. "We flattened the organization," he says. "We said the resources were here to support the schools, the schools are not here to support us." The curriculum supervisors for each grade level and subject were organized into four intervention teams and sent into the field. Initially they focused their skills and experience on low-performing schools, but there are none left. So four teams of 15 each were whittled down to two teams of 10, and they serve as roving curriculum and management consultants to schools that request help. Many of the superfluous administrators were sent back into the schools as principals and assistant principals, trimming the central administration budget from $9.9 million to $8.2 million.

The District of the Future

If the story of Ysleta were solely one of a hard-driving superintendent, market-style reforms, and rising test scores, that would be enough to distinguish it from the vast majority of urban districts. But Ysleta educators, though they draw great pride from test results, recognize that the TAAS is merely a test of minimum skills. "You really shortchange children when you teach to the tests," says Gloria Hoyos, a teacher at Ascarate Elementary. "We pride ourselves on teaching higher-order thinking." And their mission statement—that all students will be fluently bilingual and prepared for college—demands more than minimum skills.

If you talk to Ysleta officials about bilingual education, they will praise bilingualism as an asset. "You used to get paddled for speaking Spanish in school," says Lionel Nava, the principal of Riverside High. "Now Spanish is becoming a business language. I tell my kids, 'Don't lose that language.' " This makes sense when one considers that they live as close to Mexico as Americans can without changing citizenship. In El Paso, and especially in the Ysleta school district, bilingual employees are highly valued.

Ysleta's academic reputation is so strong that 2,000 children from outside the district attend schools there, bringing millions of dollars in state aid with them.

Ysleta's high pass rates on the TAAS English-language tests indicate that Ysleta's approach to bilingual education does indeed work. In turn, Ysleta's success with bilingual education suggests that the problems with bilingual education may not be the pedagogy itself but the absence of accountability and the failure to measure progress.

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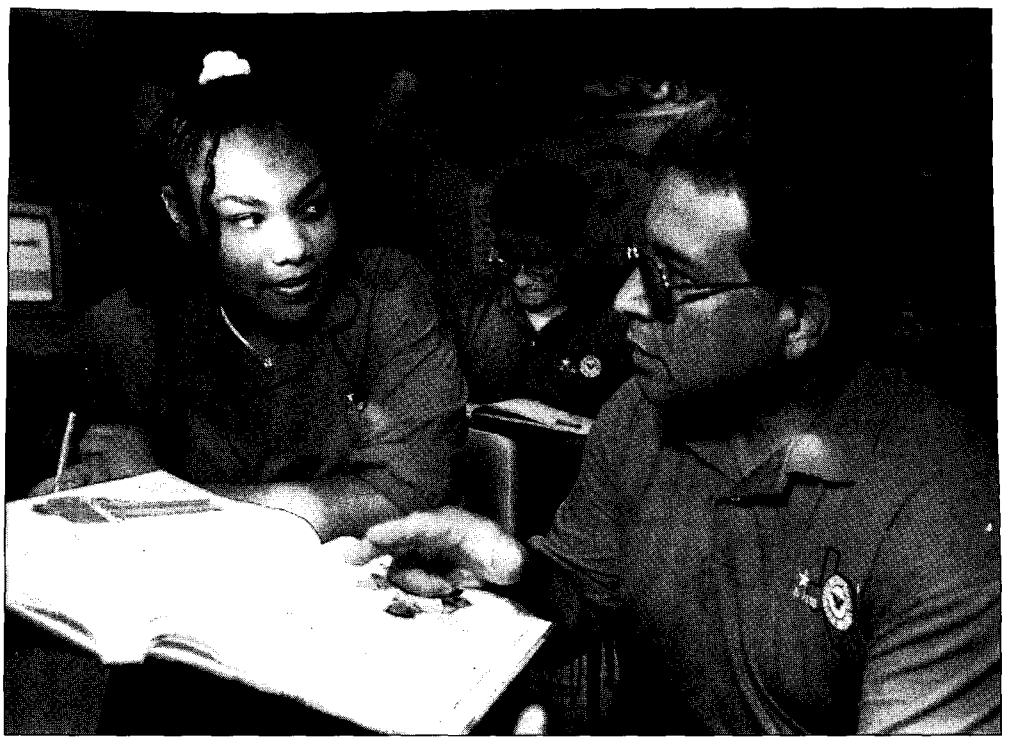
In Texas, a child labeled "LEP" may take the state tests in Spanish for up to three years before he must switch to the English-language version. If he still isn't fluent in English, his test scores will then drag down his school's rating. So Ysleta closely tracks its LEP population, testing their language skills at the beginning of each year. Their level of English proficiency is scored on a scale of one to five (four indicates full fluency, five extreme proficiency). After four years in the program, children are expected to reach level four. Any child that hasn't will receive one-on-one tutoring. The district also produces a report for principals that identifies kids who have fallen into the "danger zone"; that is, haven't met certain benchmarks on the way to full fluency. Teachers give them more help.



At Cesar Chavez Academy, Ysleta's most troubled kids receive one-on-one attention. "I always felt unwanted everywhere else except here," says one student.

"It isn't that hard to get kids to learn two languages," says Irma Trujillo, the director of the district's bilingual programs (and no relation to the superintendent). "People have just not put in the time and trouble to monitor academic progress and to expect it."

It may disappoint bilingual ed's critics to learn that Ysleta does not practice immersion. On the contrary, each district school uses one of two bilingual methods, either "Spanish 5" (also known as "late exit") or "two-way dual language." In Spanish 5, 90 percent of a child's instruction in first grade is in Spanish, and that percentage slides to 50 percent by the fourth grade. In the early grades, academic concepts are introduced in Spanish first. Once a child learns a concept, he is also taught the English vocabulary associated with it. By the time they begin learning to read English in the third grade, they already know how to read and they know many English words.

Most Ysleta schools use Spanish 5, which focuses solely on LEP students, but by the turn of the century all schools will use two-way dual language in order to meet the district's goal of having *every* student graduate bilingual. (Within the next decade, Trujillo predicts, Ysleta will make bilingualism a graduation requirement.) In "two-way," a classroom is assembled with an equal number of native Spanish speakers and native English speakers. At first, they receive most of their instruction in Spanish, because English-speaking children can be immersed without losing their English skills. Spanish-speaking kids immersed in English, by contrast, may not otherwise hear enough Spanish to retain their fluency. By the fourth or fifth grade, the teacher is conducting classes half in Spanish, half in English.

In eight "schools-within-a-school" around the district, students choose whether they want to learn in "two-way" classrooms. At Alicia Chacon International School and Hacienda Heights, both elementary schools, the entire school is "two-way" and 10 percent of class time is spent learning a third language, including Mandarin Chinese, German, or Russian. For 130 spots, Alicia Chacon had 300 applicants last year.

A School for Every Child

Alicia Chacon and Hacienda are just two of several district "magnet" schools that cater to the intellectual diversity and various needs of Ysleta's students. Bel Air High is a health-professions magnet school for students interested in becoming doctors, nurses, or X-ray technicians. Ysleta High, which was in such disrepair that state officials recommended its demolition, has become the district's performing-arts magnet. The school recently added a new music wing and plans to add two dance studios and a black-box theater. Mission Elementary builds its educational approach around the principles and organization of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Most of the students have become scouts and many of the teachers are scoutmasters; the school pays for uniforms.

Photo by Frank Muñoz

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Sageland Elementary runs a "microsociety" in which students earn "microbucks" for attendance and "purchase" products from student-run businesses. A separate building houses businesses and government agencies such as the post office, the El Pueblo restaurant, and a courthouse with all the accouterments: a witness stand, an American flag, and a haughty judge. Students learn to revile the taxman early in life. Internal Revenue Service agent and fifth-grader Augustine Valverde says, "What I like about the microsociety is when I go to the classrooms, they all say, 'Do I have to pay the taxes again?'" Sageland students graduate to Ranchland Hills Middle School, and the principal there says, "Of my students, [the ones from Sageland] are very confident, the most creative. Our leaders are from the microsociety."

The district funds Sageland's microsociety through a $3-million grant program it established to encourage innovation at the school and classroom level. Any teacher or principal with a promising idea may write a grant proposal; Sageland won nearly $200,000 to operate the microsociety. Sageland kids who want to continue learning about business can operate a firm at the Student Entrepreneur Center, a 14-acre site that holds quarterly "mercados," or flea markets, where students hawk their wares. In the future, Trujillo hopes to establish a magnet program for entrepreneurialism there.

Perhaps no Ysleta school better represents Trujillo's commitment to the education of every child than Cesar Chavez Academy. Its wrought-iron gate, stone pillars, manicured lawn, and tree-lined driveway lend the appearance of an old Southern plantation home, but its set of Pepto-Bismol-colored, one-room school buildings suggest you've entered Candyland. Nothing about its appearance suggests that it houses Ysleta's most troubled kids.

Students who are expelled from other schools or who land in the juvenile justice system are sent to Cesar Chavez. Principal Lilia Limon says 67 different street gangs are represented on campus. Yet as you walk the school's grounds, students clad in red shirts and black pants introduce themselves, deliver firm handshakes, and say, "It's nice to meet you." You enter a classroom and the students stand, line up, and greet you one at a time. Limon claims the school had only three fights last year.

In most districts, these kids would be the castaways, the incorrigibles. At Cesar Chavez, they have at least 10 computers in each classroom and a staff that treats them like family. "I always felt unwanted everywhere else except here," says one student. The school's reputation has grown so much that two-thirds of its students are now there by choice. Rosa Aguilar had dropped out of school to support her family; she came to Chavez Academy and recently received a $1,000 scholarship from an educational software firm to attend New Mexico State University.

Threats to Success

As its SAT scores indicate, Ysleta still has a long way to go before all students are prepared to enter a four-year college. Tenth grade, the only high-school grade that takes the TAAS, is also the only grade in which Ysleta students still trail the state average, though that gap has narrowed significantly. Some districts in this situation might discourage low-performing students from taking the SAT to inflate their average scores, but Ysleta has nothing to hide. The district has in fact begun paying the test fees for students taking the SAT or the Preliminary SAT (PSAT), as well as offering SAT mini-camps during the summer free of charge. "We will see a huge jump in scores over the next two years," promises Trujillo. The district has also raised the academic requirements for graduation, including four years of college-preparatory math, science, and English, to align them with typical college requirements.

Unfortunately, it seems likely that a foolish school board bent on self-aggrandizement will push Trujillo out before he can accomplish all that he wants. The school district had pulled him out of retirement, and at his age (65), his farmhouse in Virginia looks more appealing than battles with a school board that will not support him. He has indicated that if the school board meets his buyout demands, he will probably leave sometime this fall.

But if he does go, he will leave behind a group of school principals and teachers who have tasted success. They have matured in a culture that demanded more from them, perhaps more than they thought could be done. What impresses about Ysleta is not the beaming children, nor the beautiful buildings, nor the hyperinvolved parents, nor the ratio of three computers to every child. It's the attitudes of the educators, who repeatedly say, without prompting, that "no excuses" are accepted in Ysleta, or constantly beg you to visit their schools, to see the innovative things they are doing. This is what happens when people are given both freedom and responsibility. And there's no reason it couldn't happen everywhere else.

Unfortunately, it seems likely that a foolish board bent on self-aggrandizement will push Trujillo out before he can accomplish all he wants.

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Support Your Local Charter School

Photo by Rod Sanford / Lansing (Mich.) State Journal

Civic entrepreneurs will be critical to the success of these fledgling independent public schools

By Chester E. Finn Jr. And Bruno V. Manno

A year ago, the National Commission on Philanthropy and Civic Renewal urged Americans to "give smarter" and to support the community-based, results-oriented organizations that have the greatest impact on people and neighborhoods. In its report, *Giving Better, Giving Smarter,* the commission concluded that philanthropy must cultivate a new kind of giver—the "civic entrepreneur"—if it is to invest its money and time in ways that make a palpable difference in the lives of those in need.

Civic entrepreneurs build vibrant community institutions. They are as exacting in their giving and volunteering as they are in selecting their family doctor, buying a house, or choosing a college for their children. Their philanthropy is strategic, more like a long-term investment than a one-time gift. They tackle specific problems in their own communities by clearing paths to self-reliance and opportunity. They are willing to back bold new solutions, but they insist that civic enterprises remain accountable and achieve results.

Civic entrepreneurs need not be super-rich. Millions of ordinary people give money to community institutions or volunteer their time. Our task here is

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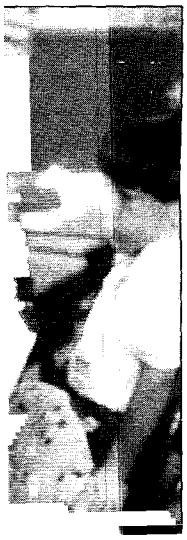

First-grader Xavier Norton participates enthusiastically in the first day of class at Mid-Michigan Public School Academy, in Lansing, Michigan.

to suggest just a few of the ways in which civic entrepreneurs can play a crucial role in fostering one of the best examples of such community organizations: charter schools.

Help Wanted

A charter school is an independent public school freed from most bureaucratic hassles in return for producing superior results. If it delivers those results—for the same money as "regular" public schools, or less—and succeeds in attracting students, it gets to keep its charter and remain open. If it fails, it risks institutional death from the loss of either its charter or its students.

It's a tantalizing idea, and a popular one, judging from the length of the waiting lists at most of the nation's 1,000-plus charter schools, the frequency with which new schools appear, and the eagerness of many states to pass charter-school legislation. In a sphere of American life too fond of faddish "innovation," charter schools represent a genuine alternative to the status quo. At their best, they hold out the promise of many benefits: They give freer rein to creative, entrepreneurial, motivated educators; they welcome and encourage more involvement by parents; they subject competing teaching methods and curricula to the judgment of education consumers; they spur conventional public schools to improve their performance; and they offer a diverse set of students a safe learning environment led by educators committed to achievement.

Furthermore, as charter schools help us reinvent education, they help us reinvigorate civil society in America. They are community-based learning centers shaped by shared needs, priorities, and expectations. These expectations create moral norms and values that permeate these new schools. Charter schools offer educators the opportunity to create new professional communities, freed from centralized micromanagement and run according to a set of shared educational precepts. Finally, charter schools eschew rigid contracts with teachers' unions in favor of employment arrangements that value initiative, entrepreneurship, and results.

Our experience with charter schools suggests, however, that their success and continued proliferation are hardly assured. They need a lot of help if they are to flourish as genuine options for more than a handful of American children. There are a thousand ways in which civic entrepreneurs can help charter schools. For the purposes of this article, however, we are addressing our suggestions to a particular subset of civic entrepreneurs: those individuals and organizations best able to nurture fledgling charter schools with financial support and technical expertise.

Like any new venture, charter schools encounter their share of start-up problems: bureaucratic red tape, a dearth of facilities, cash-flow gaps, personnel problems, unpredictable demand, and skimpy materials. Even with good planning, the first year is usually grueling, and the second year brings fresh challenges. Without the help that only civic entrepreneurs can provide, some will surely falter, while others will take longer than necessary to prove their worth.

We have identified four critical needs that civic entrepreneurs can help satisfy: start-up capital and facilities, technical expertise, protection from hostile regulators, and effective accountability systems.

1. Start-Up Capital

If charter schools are to be an option for a significant number of families, it's obvious that there must be many more of them. Yet the barriers to entry are high. It's risky, costly, and onerous to bring a charter school into being. No, it shouldn't be too easy to start a new school. But today it's thoroughly daunting. The higher the barriers to entry, the fewer the people intrepid enough to start a charter school or enroll their children in one.

By far the most difficult barrier is access to capital: acquiring a building; refurbishing, furnishing, and equipping it; obtaining books and other instructional materials.

As public institutions, charter schools are entitled to public funding in proportion to the number of students they enroll. State laws authorizing charter schools, however, typically leave two financial hurdles for start-ups. First, despite the urgent expense of equipping and staffing a facility, the initial public funds typically do not flow until after the school year begins. Second, state laws provide for public funding only of the schools' operating expenses, not of their facilities or other capital needs. The schools have no access to bonds or other forms of public borrowing. Private vendors regard them as poor credit risks, since they have little collateral and their flow of operating dollars is assured only for the term of their charter, which rarely lasts more than five years and sometimes just two or three. "Without private help," says Mark Kushner, the principal of a San Francisco charter school for 180 ninth- and 10-graders, "we wouldn't be here."

Civic entrepreneurs can help charter schools get started by assisting with the acquisition of facilities, equipment, and materials. Here are suggestions on how to do that, along with examples of what's been done.

Provide direct support. Through outright grants or access to borrowed capital on reasonable

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terms, civic entrepreneurs can help charter schools obtain the wherewithal to begin. The Fenton Avenue Charter School, in Los Angeles, for example, received grants totaling $164,000 from the Riordan Foundation to purchase new high-tech equipment and computer software. This purchase became a magnet for financing partnerships with Educational Management Group and General Telephone Electronics worth nearly $1.2 million. These partnerships have supplemented Fenton's educational program with computer software, multimedia computers in every classroom, a fiber-optic cable network, and a closed-circuit TV channel that is unique among California elementary schools.

In Texas, the Financial Foundation for Charter Schools has secured more than $3.5 million from local businesses and banks to help charter schools with startup costs. More than 25 schools have applied for these loans.

Support for facilities is less common but now growing. For example, the Ball Foundation of Glen Ellyn, Illinois, has entered into an innovative agreement with a real-estate developer, Continental Homes of Arizona, to build Ball-operated charter schools in three Continental communities around the Sunshine State. The firm is selling Ball the land at cost, and the foundation will pay for buildings. These schools will also function as community centers, including adult education and after-school care. The foundation has also provided a grant of $221,000 (mostly for facility renovations) to a group in Chandler, Arizona, that wants to open a Ball Charter School. In Denver, several foundations and business groups have raised more than $4 million to rehabilitate a historic school building for a new charter school.

Create a financing authority. Like other public entities, charter schools can benefit from using either public or private financing authorities to build or renovate facilities. Such an outfit may secure bond-financing on favorable terms, pool loans to several charter schools to reduce the risk to lenders, or furnish a revolving loan fund of privately raised dollars. A group of D.C.-based philanthropists and investors have launched a nonprofit venture called the Charter School Development Corporation. Supported by private money, its mission is to provide both early working capital and capital for school facilities and equipment. It wants to create a foundation partnership for pooling funds to help guarantee construction bonds. Ultimately, it hopes to develop a model for a nationwide program. Says program director Danny Rose, "Many banks are hesitant about approving credit for charter schools, but the risk level of many charter schools is better than a lot of small businesses."

The Prudential Foundation began a $10-million revolving fund so that New Jersey charter schools can borrow money for start-up expenses as early as seven months before the school opens. (The money may not be used for buildings and must be re-paid within a year or two.) It offers an interest rate between 2.5 and 5 percent, depending upon the school's collateralization.

Public dollars can also sometimes be leveraged in this way. For example, Chicago's public-school system provided $2 million to the Illinois Facilities Fund to create a revolving loan fund for charter-school facilities, equipment, and start-up expenses. So far, six schools have received help this way, including three that would have folded without it. A North Carolina program called Self Help channels both public and private dollars to its Community Facilities Fund, which helps charter schools acquire and renovate facilities, lease

How Lawmakers Can Help

Charter schools would not face so many hurdles if policymakers set more reasonable terms for their existence. Civic entrepreneurs and other proponents of charter schools should be alert for opportunities to advocate better terms in a number of areas:

Strong chartering laws. State charter laws set the framework for the scale, resources, and autonomy of charter schools. Strong laws allow charter schools wide latitude in their finances, educational program, and operations. Strong laws also permit well-qualified individuals without conventional certification to teach in charter schools; let any individual, group, or organization submit a charter proposal; grant automatic exemptions from most red tape; allow public authorities other than the local school board to approve charters; and permit a large (or unlimited) number of charter schools.

Access to financing. Resource woes are the greatest single barrier to establishment of charter schools. Few such schools receive any capital funding, and in many places their per-pupil operating budgets are lower than those of conventional public schools. Yet they are expected to produce superior results. A state could ease the capital problem in several ways. It might lend capital to charter schools from its own pension or "rainy day" funds. It could direct state agencies to assist charter schools or create new agencies to do so. Or the state might simply guarantee private borrowing by charter schools, much as the federal government backs small-business loans.

Sound accountability systems. At the heart of the charter notion is the exchange of operational freedom for superior performance. That means setting standards for what students should be learning, testing them, and applying consequences to schools that fail to achieve their goals. But today, it's hard to know how well these schools are doing. One reason is that today's charter accountability systems are underdeveloped, reflecting the sad state of education accountability in nearly every state. Policymakers need to develop better systems that link standards, tests, and consequences.

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equipment, and meet other start-up needs. So far, it has supplied loans and working capital to five charter schools, two of which would have closed without this help.

Donate or lease property. A former parochial school, an unused warehouse, or part of a shopping mall can be turned into a terrific site for a charter school. Carole Little and her business partner, Leonard Rabinowitz, donated a $6.8-million former designer-clothing factory to the Accelerated Charter School, a facility for low-income children in South Central Los Angeles. The site has five buildings (totaling 200,000 square feet), some of which will be remodeled as school buildings. The gift is a godsend to a school with 170 kids enrolled and another 900 on the waiting list. Rabinowitz also serves on a panel that has promised to undertake a $50-million fundraising effort over the next two years to aid the school and establish a teacher-training center for the school district.

Civic entrepreneurs can raise capital for charter schools in other ways. They can prod public authorities and community development agencies to unlock mothballed buildings for use as charter schools; they can lobby individual philanthropists, local foundations, companies, and nonprofit groups (especially youth service groups, universities, and professional organizations) to support these schools; and they can help with fundraising campaigns.

2. Technical Assistance

How do charter schools develop the leadership and expertise they need to flourish? Even the best-intentioned founders often lack crucial know-how. They may, for example, have terrific ideas about education but have no clue about the complex financial side of charter operations. Or they may know a lot about business but next to nothing about curriculum and testing. A successful charter school must master a bewildering array of issues, including curriculum development, contract negotiation, liability protection, educational theory, governance structure, personnel policy, facility management, academic assessment, and budgeting, among others.

In the near term, schools need an instant source of the expertise they lack. Over the long run, the charter movement urgently needs to augment its supply of people with both the know-how and the desire to create and lead successful schools. Today's would-be charter leaders have no training centers, no clear "apprenticeship" route, and no clearinghouse for expertise. Civic entrepreneurs can help those who are already interested in creating charter schools—and boost the supply of such people for tomorrow. They can, for example:

Supply training and technical assistance. Civic entrepreneurs can underwrite centers for training and technical assistance that help charter schools anticipate or solve the pitfalls of start-up and operation or that prepare individuals to establish or work for charter schools. These centers can also assess a school's organizational strengths and weaknesses during on-site management reviews, research policy issues, brief legislators, educate the news media, and raise money for individual schools. Creating such technical assistance centers has been a common form of support for the charter movement, though much more is still needed, especially in states and communities that are new to the charter idea.

The Pioneer Institute's Charter Schools Resource Center assists schools in Massachusetts. The center publishes a handbook on developing curriculum, managing enrollment, assessing results, and handling a budget. The center also helps schools raise funds from private sources to pay for facilities and other start-up costs; issues annual research reports on the status of the state's charter schools; and keeps state legislators informed on how charter schools are working. The center's work is supported by individual donors, foundation grants, and an organization of Bay State business leaders called CEOs for Fundamental Changes in Education.

The St. Paul and Minneapolis foundations have formed a partnership to launch a new resource center, the Twin Cities Charter Schools Project, within the University of Minnesota's Center for School Change. The center provides technical assistance in the form of workshops, consultants, and networking opportunities to nearly 20 charter-school groups in the Twin Cities, particularly in financial and legal issues. The foundations backing the center want to deploy the charter idea as a community development strategy in low-income neighborhoods.

The charter-school movement needs to augment its supply of people with the know-how and the desire to create and lead successful schools.

The Charter Schools Development Center, housed at California State University in Sacramento, provides charter-school directors and boards with comprehensive guidance on starting up and operating charter schools. It's particularly known for its how-to guides and its intensive and rigorous "boot camp" workshops for starting up, managing, and financing charter schools. Supported mainly by private foundations, the center estimates it has helped half of California's charter schools so far.

The New Jersey Institute for School Innovation, a nonprofit coalition of corporate CEOs and leading foundations, helped create the Charter

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What Are Charter Schools Like?

Unlike most conventional public schools, many charter schools owe their existence to grassroots initiatives. In their capacities as philanthropists, parents, and members of their communities, civic entrepreneurs ought to be aware of the many opportunities to nurture charter schools.

Charter schools are typically either conversions (pre-existing schools that secede from the "system") or start-ups (new schools created by charter). Those who launch them fall into three groups: educators, parents, and an array of third parties that include nonprofit organizations, for-profit businesses, and multi-service community groups like Boys and Girls Clubs. A few examples from around the country convey a sense of the needs, passions, and visions that are motivating the founders of these independent public schools.

The **Minnesota New Country School** in LeSueur, Minnesota, is managed by a "cooperative" of educators. Founded in 1994 in several downtown storefronts, it enrolls some 95 students in grades seven through 12 and offers an individualized approach to learning. Each student fashions his or her own projects and sets academic goals in consultation with teachers and parents.

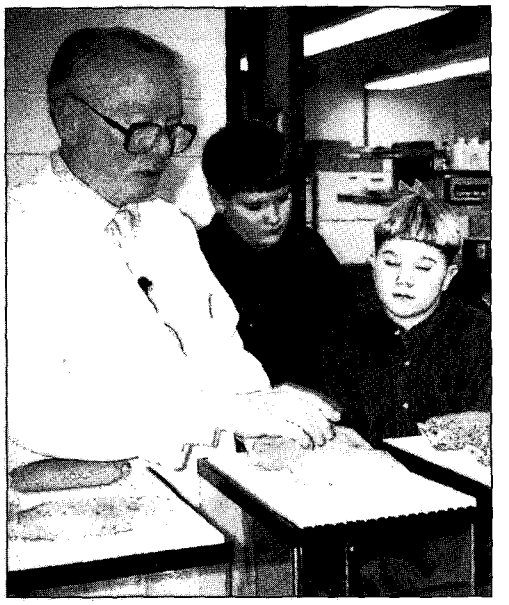
School officials describe their approach as "entrepreneurial." Computer-savvy students, for instance, run an Internet-access service for the surrounding area. New Country has no employees as such. Rather, its governing board has a performance-based contract with EdVisions Cooperative, a group of New Country School educators (and others), for its educational management. These educators, then, are both employees and employers.

Oakland Charter Academy illustrates the parent-initiated start-up. In the early 1990s, a group of parents whose children attended Lazear Elementary School in Oakland grew concerned about the quality of middle schools in their mostly Hispanic community. These parents found the public schools overcrowded, unsafe, and ill-equipped to teach children with limited English. In 1993, not long after the California legislature authorized charter schools, these parents asked Clementina Duron, then principal of Lazear, to help them start a charter school for grades six through eight.

Despite intense opposition from the teachers' union and the local school board, the school opened with 120 students. Its hallmarks are smaller classes, longer school days, firm discipline, and a pledge required of all parents to attend monthly meetings and assist with many administrative and custodial tasks around the school. Despite early difficulty in finding a permanent location, it now enrolls around 175 students, nearly all from minority groups.

Responding to Governor John Engler's call for the creation of secondary "technical schools," a coalition of educators and local industry leaders in 1995 founded the **Livingston Technical Academy** in Lowell, Michigan. The eight-hours-a-day curriculum for its 35 11th- and 12th-grade students combines traditional academic subjects with hands-on technical skills. Every student spends 10 weeks a year apprenticed to local firms in such areas as metalwork, electronics, and robotics. Housed on the campus of a local college, Livingston is one of several "trade academy" charter schools that received start-up grants from the state's Job Commission.

Fenton Avenue Charter School is a preschool through sixth-grade school that seceded from the Los Angeles Unified School District to operate independently. Until its conversion in 1994, Fenton Avenue had among the lowest test scores and attendance rates and among the highest teacher turnover rates in the San Fernando Valley. It has boosted pupil test scores more than 20 percent in the last two years; teacher absenteeism has declined 80 percent since its pre-charter status, and its student-attendance rate is higher than all noncharter schools in the school district. With $1 million-plus in grants from public, nonprofit, and corporate sources, it has linked all its classrooms together with a model closed-circuit TV network used for a range of lessons in communications technology.



At the Minnesota New Country School, in LeSueur, local college professors are frequent guests in science classes.

Photo courtesy of Minnesota New Country School

Open year-round, it educates nearly 1,300 students with a teaching staff of 70. Its enrollment is almost entirely minority and low-income. Besides a solid, phonics-based reading program for students, it operates a family center, an English-as-a-second-language program for adults, citizenship classes, after-school enrichment classes, study halls, and academic clinics.

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School Resource Center of New Jersey. The center has supplied all of New Jersey's 39 charter schools with guidance on funding and legal issues as well as opportunities to network with more experienced charter-school leaders. It is now receiving support from more than a half dozen foundations in New Jersey and New York.

The Charter Friends National Network, based in St, Paul, Minnesota, is researching a "consumer's guide" to promising models for facilities financing. Similar projects are planned for "governance" issues that charter schools face, for special education, and for accountability issues.

Leadership for Quality Education (LQE), a group of Chicago business leaders seeking to advance the cause of local education reform, has established itself as a major incubator of charter schools. It has been particularly helpful to prospective groups trying to raise seed money and navigate the Windy City's tough charter-approval process. "LQE provided us with a great deal of help with grants and research," says Michele Smith, the director of a technology-oriented charter school in west Chicago, at a critical point when "we did not have the knowledge or the time" to raise funds alone.

The Morris and Gwendlyn Cafritz Foundation of Washington, D.C., provided the local Apple Tree Institute for Education Innovation with $200,000 for operating support to start charter schools in D.C. The funds supported a successful application to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development for a grant to convert unoccupied government offices into two new charter schools.

Some foundations directly support charter schools or groups that want to create such schools. For example, through the Fisher Family Foundation, Donald and Doris Fisher of San Francisco (founders of the Gap clothing chain) will give $25 million to groups in the Bay Area that wish to become Edison charter schools. The money will help pay for the schools' start-up costs. The Texas-based Challenge Foundation and the Arkansas-based Walton Family Foundation both support individual charter schools, particularly in the areas of curriculum and staff development.

Donate services. Business owners can loan employees from their firms—or recruit others to do so, or pay for consultants—to help individuals start charter schools or work with school operators to train the people they need. For example, the San Diego Chamber of Commerce Business Roundtable for Education assembles a group of consultants three times a year to assist a consortium of 15 local charter schools. It pays for—and enlists those who will donate—advisers on financial, legal, and management issues, among others. The Colorado Lawyers Committee recruits attorneys and law firms to provide help *pro bono* for charter applicants, including writing proposals and assisting those whose charter requests are rejected and then appealed to the state. (They are often successful.)

Support professional development. Civic entrepreneurs can provide scholarships, fellowships, and other "mentoring" relationships to incubate the future creators of charter schools. For example, they can fund site visits to successful schools that can serve as role models for others. San Diego's Business Roundtable for Education subsidizes the expenses of school employees to attend an annual statewide conference on professional skills. It also links principals and members of school budget committees with mentors from the business world.

In addition, civic entrepreneurs can serve on the boards of existing charter schools and on committees exploring the creation of new ones, and they can urge corporate training centers to open up to charter-school personnel.

3. Safeguarding Freedom

Charter schools have myriad political foes who do their utmost to prevent enabling legislation from being enacted in the first place. If they can't stymie the movement as a whole, they strive to keep charter schools few and weak. One favorite strategy is to regulate them to death, or at least into conformity with conventional public schools. Insofar as they succeed, charter schools lose their essential *raison d'être.* The basic bargain is freedom for results. Yet the education system balks at giving these schools real freedom, so the danger of re-regulation is omnipresent.

The danger arises from several sources: bureaucratic creep, interest groups that prefer the status quo, and scandal and catastrophe. Anything that goes wrong in any charter school in the land leads someone somewhere to say, "We must develop new procedures and safeguards to ensure that such a thing never happens again." Gradually, inexorably, the regulations and procedures accumulate.

Charter schools have myriad political foes who strive to keep them weak and few. One favorite strategy is to regulate them to death.

Much of this is stuff for politicians and policymakers, but civic entrepreneurs can help to fend off the re-regulation of charter schools in at least two ways:

Organize watchdog and advocacy groups. These organizations can counter assaults on charter autonomy by regulators and, conversely, can check tendencies by charter schools to grow stodgy, complacent and self-interested. The North Carolina Education Reform Foundation

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(NCERF), which receives financial support from several sources, was initially created to promote greater parental choice in education. Since passage of the North Carolina charter law, it has been the state's most vocal watchdog for charter schools.

When the state's advisory board on charter schools tried to meet behind closed doors, NCERF blew the whistle. It has also sponsored mock "legislative hearings" on charter-school issues, run by challengers to political incumbents and open to the public, to protest the senate's inaction on charter-school laws. NCERF's director, Vernon Robinson, is also something of a one-man army watching out for those charter enthusiasts who, in his words, become "wimpy or satisfied or lose interest in building a movement after they get their charters."

Some of the charter-school technical assistance centers described above also strive to keep state and local policymakers informed about the problems and triumphs of charter school. For example, a key purpose of the Colorado League of Charter Schools is to "educate" the legislature on charter schools—and to keep its own membership from complacency. The Michigan Association of Public School Academies (charter schools are called "academies" in Michigan) and the Goldwater Institute in Arizona see their roles in a similar fashion.

Establish "friends groups." These groups serve both to support true charter friends and counter false friends and outright foes. Several regional, local, and national foundations—particularly the Walton Family Foundation and the Kinship Foundation—are supporting the creation of these groups at the state and national levels. These convene meetings and develop publications on topics of concern to charter schools. One of the largest of these is the California Network of Education Charters. It holds an annual state-wide conference, drawing attendees from California and around the country.

If the movement can live up to its commitment to be accountable for student achievement, conventional public schools will face more pressure to follow.

Another example is Minnesota's Charter Friends National Network, which is negotiating with the state's education department over how broadly charter schools may define teacher licensing. The Minnesota Association of Charter Schools parleys with state agencies to ensure that schools receive all the public funding to which they are entitled. Development of such a "friends" group in Ohio is one of the projects of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (with which both authors are associated).

4. Fostering Accountability

A charter school's best defense against death by regulation is a bulletproof accountability arrangement, but it needs help in getting there. If these schools are to succeed, parents and policymakers need solid assurance that they are truly delivering better results for less money. Just as important, if the charter-school movement as a whole can live up to its commitment to be accountable for student achievement, conventional public schools will experience even more pressure to follow.

Accountability remains an acute problem for charter schools across the land. As best we can tell, only Massachusetts has in place a solid, statewide charter accountability plan. Promising strategies are arising in Colorado and the District of Columbia. But there's a long way to go. The hallmarks of a good system of student accountability for academic results include: (1) measurable standards for what students are expected to learn; (2) regular tests that permit parents and policymakers to both measure progress over time and compare each charter school to the rest of the district and the state; and (3) rewards for mastering standards and consequences for failure. Besides student performance, charter schools are legitimately held to account by their sponsors for the other claims and promises made in their charter applications: tending the youngsters in their care, handling public dollars responsibly, and obeying those laws and regulations that have not been waived.

But how to know whether these things are in fact happening? Many essential indicators remain to be developed. We've seen lots of pious promises in charter applications and plenty of lofty claims by state charter programs. But we've seen few viable instruments or systems so far. How can civic entrepreneurs help on the accountability front?

Create accountability boards. These independent (state or local) boards would weigh evidence about charter-school performance and problems and present sober, balanced reports to the public. Those interested in creating such a group might look to California and its bipartisan "Little Hoover" Commission as a model. In 1996, the commission issued one of the first-ever statewide examinations of charter schools in response to early assaults on California's charter program by those it termed "critics, some with vested interests in the existing system." Its generally positive report helped to set the fledgling charter movement in California on solid ground. Although the commission is an independent state oversight agency created to promote efficiency, economy, and improved service in government, civic entrepreneurs could generate private-sector counterparts to play similar watchdog roles.

Help fund individual school and state-level task forces. Such panels would design genuine ac-

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countability systems that set measurable goals and standards for students and educators and that can then be assessed to determine whether these goals have been reached. Help is also needed for those charter schools that get into accountability-related trouble—for example, problems related to finances, governance, or staffing.

For example, a Boston group named Learning Contract has received foundation support to develop an advanced information-management system that allows schools and parents to track what students have been taught and which pupils have mastered which academic skills. Eventually such information could be available via the Internet. So far, 16 schools around the country have signed on as pilot sites. The Gates Foundation is helping the Colorado League of Charter Schools to develop an accountability plan for Colorado schools that are using the Core Knowledge curriculum of E.D. Hirsch.

The D.C. Public Charter School Board has received a foundation grant to create a cooperative for the 10 schools it has chartered. Called the D.C. Charter League for Accountable Schools (DC CLAS), the group's purpose is to help each of its schools create an accountability plan for fulfilling its mission. This might include audits of the school's finances and management practices and measures of student performance and attendance. CLAS offers consultants and conducts workshops on accountability issues.

Finally, several technical assistance centers have undertaken their own evaluations of charter schools. The Pioneer Institute surveys Massachusetts schools annually. The University of Minnesota's Center for School Change produces ongoing studies of charter schools. The most recent of these investigated how a sample of charter schools measures student achievement, whether the schools are boosting achievement, and what these schools are doing to meet their accountability requirements.

A Subversive Influence

Charter schools are a subversive influence with the potential for doing great harm to the educational status quo and great good for children. Implicit in them is a fundamental redefinition of what we mean by public education and a profound alternative to the familiar bureaucratic monopoly. In the face of relentless attacks by forces that find the prospect of charter-school success alarming, however, we must wonder whether the charter-school movement will be allowed to get big and strong enough to demonstrate its full potential.

Charter schools are a powerful engine for the renewal of civil society, particularly those aspects that attend to the community's neediest members. The participation of individuals in the creation of charter schools is itself an exercise in citizenship: people rolling up their sleeves, joining together, and working side-by-side to improve one of the most fundamental institutions in any community: its schools. The process of creating charter schools cannot but help to recharge our democratic batteries. These schools are, in Peter Drucker's formulation, "[N]ot the collectivism of organized governmental action from above" but "the collectivism of voluntary group action from below."

That is exactly the sort of project that civic entrepreneurs should be embracing: clearing their path, solving their problems, assisting their creation, repelling their foes, and propelling them to success.

Chester E. Finn Jr. *is the president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and John M. Olin Fellow in the Washington, D.C., office of the Hudson Institute.* ***Bruno V. Manno*** *is a senior fellow with the Hudson Institute and a member of the Fordham board of directors. Both authors participated in the National Commission on Philanthropy and Civic Renewal (supported by the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation).*

Charter-School Resources

Many of the organizations mentioned in this article can provide further information about assisting the charter-school movement.

Charter Friends National Network (St. Paul, Minn.) • Tel.: (612) 644-5270.
Charter School Development Corp. (Washington, D.C.) • Tel.: (202) 739-9629.
Charter Schools Development Ctr. (Sacramento, Calif.) • Tel.: (916) 278-4600.
Colorado League of Charter Schools • Tel.: (303) 989-5356.
Community Facilities Fund (Durham, N.C.) • Tel.: (919) 956-4400.
D.C. Charter League for Accountable Schools • Tel.: (202) 887-5011.
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (Washington, D.C.) • Tel.: (202) 223-5452.
Financial Fndtn. for Charter Schools (Houston, Tex.) • Tel.: (713) 420-3750.
New Jersey Inst. for School Innovation (Newark, N.J.) • Tel.: (973) 621-6467; Web site: njw.injersey.com/schools/CSRC.
North Carolina Education Reform Foundation (Durham, N.C.) • Tel.: (919) 419-8844; Web site: www.successnet.net/ncerf.
Pioneer Institute's Charter Schools Resource Ctr. (Boston, Mass.) • Tel.: (617) 723-2277; Web site: www.pioneerinstitute.org/csrc/index.html.
Twin Cities Charter Schools Project (Minneapolis, Minn.) • Tel.: (612) 625-7552; Web site: www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/school-change/newtwin.htm.

Also, the **Center for Education Reform**, a D.C.-based education advocacy group, publishes *The Charter School Workbook*, a comprehensive guide to the movement. Tel.: (800) 521-2118; Web site: www.edreform.com.

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Legends of the Sprawl

Liberals have a new scapegoat for their urban failures: suburban growth

By Steven Hayward

The remarkable thing about liberal urban policy in Washington these days is not its ambition, but its conspicuous lack of it. A case in point is the Clinton administration's second annual *State of the Cities* report, recently released by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Beyond the self-congratulatory references to President Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, the substance of the report reflects the timidity of liberal policymakers.

On the one hand, the report details the good news about major cities: employment is rising, poverty and crime are down, and most cities are fiscally sound. A 1997 survey found that 85 percent of mayors rated the health of their cities at seven or higher on a scale of one to 10, a sign that can-do optimism has taken hold in city halls throughout the country. On the other hand, older central cities still face a set of problems that threaten to grow worse: Poverty is overwhelmingly concentrated in inner cities, urban schools are abysmal, and jobs and population continue to migrate to the suburbs. These "structural challenges," the HUD report warns, "could eventually undermine the long-term success of urban America."

So what does HUD propose to solve these problems? More zoning. No, not the usual regulatory kind, but "empowerment zones" that target distressed urban areas with modest tax breaks and federal investment for retaining and creating businesses and jobs. The HUD report also calls for "homeownership zones" to help provide affordable housing and "education opportunity zones" to funnel aid to the worst urban schools. Many of the initiatives described in the HUD report are existing programs in other agencies (such as job

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training and cleaning up polluted urban sites) shoehorned into the administration's urban agenda. The report is, of course, silent on two ideas that would help cities immediately: school choice and local regulatory relief.

The report's most striking element is the modest amount of new federal money it proposes for urban programs: less than $1.4 billion, mostly for the empowerment zones and subsidies for the worst urban schools. In this way the report sharply departs from liberal urban policy since the Great Society era, which has offered federal spending as the solution to urban woes. Lyndon Johnson would have thought this report's low-budget liberalism was a Republican parody.

The Next Wave

But if the liberal imagination in Washington seems zoned out, there is a lot of ferment among liberal thinkers elsewhere. The next wave of liberal urban policy is coming not from Washington, but from the grass roots, and that wave is cresting fast. Having attempted urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s and failed, liberals in the 1990s are ready to try *suburban renewal.*

Perhaps no other individual epitomizes the new liberal vision as well as Myron Orfield. Orfield is a 37-year-old lawyer, law professor, and state legislator in Minnesota who has become one of the nation's most vocal proponents of regional solutions to urban problems. In the view of Orfield and a handful of other liberal urbanists, the trouble with urban areas today is suburban flight. As more and more middle-class people flee the central cities for the suburbs, shrinking tax bases, rising crime, and poorly performing schools push the central cities into free fall. As suburbs attract new jobs away from central cities and expand their tax base, the (suburban) rich get richer and the (urban) poor get poorer.

"In the United States," Orfield wrote in his 1996 book, *Metropolitics*, "each generation builds a new ring of cities at the edge of our metropolitan areas, as a central city or an inner ring of suburbs becomes isolated and declines." Soon the problems of the central city begin spreading to the inner-ring suburbs, and middle-class people move further out, leading to a spiral of instability and socioeconomic segregation. Orfield has produced a series of dazzling color maps based on census data to illustrate the social and economic trends linking central cities, inner-ring suburbs, and edge cities, and he is in demand as a speaker and consultant around the nation. "Today," he claims, "70 percent of the nation lives in metropolitan areas that are destabilizing and polarizing to one degree or another."

Orfield says that "regional polarization" can be countered only through a "strong, multifaceted, regional response." This means, first of all, consolidating the regional tax base so as to redistribute suburban revenues to the impoverished central city. In its fullest expression, however, Orfield would prefer an elected regional government with strong powers to plan transportation and land use, impose "fair-share" low-income housing requirements on the suburbs, and direct reinvestment to the central cities. Orfield thinks a political coalition of the central cities and threatened inner-ring suburbs could carry the day in many places, though he has many bruises to show for his efforts to promote piecemeal regionalism in the Minnesota state legislature. (Governor Arne Carlson has vetoed the few Orfield bills that have managed to reach his desk.) But if ganging up on the suburbs doesn't work in progressive Minnesota, it is not likely to work elsewhere.

If suburbs are weakening the cities, then the solution seems to be: tax them, annex them, or constrict them.

Shaky Foundations

The chief argument in favor of Orfield's broad regionalism is the "elastic city" hypothesis, expressed most fully in David Rusk's book *Cities Without Suburbs.* Elastic cities are those that either embrace some form of regionalism or, better still, expand their boundaries by annexing suburbs. Premier examples of elastic cities include Jacksonville, Florida, and Indianapolis. Elastic cities, Rusk and Orfield claim, have fewer competing jurisdictions, stronger job growth and higher incomes, less segregation, and better fiscal management. Inelastic cities such as St. Louis and Chicago have many more suburban jurisdictions and suffer from concentrated poverty, racial segregation, and so forth.

This categorical comparison, however, may rest upon sloppy statistical analysis. A group of urban-policy scholars including the Buckeye Institute's Sam Staley argued in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* that Rusk's hypothesis was a mere "statistical artifact." A simple thought experiment illustrates the problem. Take a central city of 200,000 residents, with a per-capita income of $10,000 and a 15 percent poverty rate, and combine it with a suburb of 50,000 people with a $12,000 per-capita income and a 10 percent poverty rate. We would instantly create a new city of 250,000 with a per-capita income of $10,400 and a

Left: As the "New Urbanists" see it, suburban sprawl has been spreading like a cancer ever since Levittown, New York, brought detached homes and a little patch of green within reach of the masses.

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poverty rate of 13 percent—*even though the social profile of the central city has not changed at all.* Much of Rusk's theory is thus based on a simple statistical capture of suburban well-being that masks inner-city problems rather than improving them.

Rusk and Orfield also argue that elastic cities do a better job of reducing racial segregation in housing patterns. But their static statistical picture of cities overlooks a trend that refutes their thesis. One of their favorite segregation statistics is the Census Bureau's "index of dissimilarity," which measures on a zero to 100 scale the proportion of the minority population that would need to move to achieve an absolute proportional distribution of minorities across all census tracts. (An index score of 100 would mean complete segregation, zero would mean complete proportional integration; or, in other words, zero would mean that each census tract has the same racial composition as the city as a whole.)

Rusk and Orfield argue that inelastic cities have higher index scores (that is, more segregation) than elastic cities. Yet neither takes note of the trend of the past 25 years, which shows a 10 percent *decline* in the index of dissimilarity for the 15 cities with the largest black populations (including the inelastic cities of St. Louis and Chicago). In *America in Black and White*, Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom examined census data for 232 metropolitan areas and found that, between 1970 and 1990, the index of dissimilarity declined in 208 of the 232 areas. This is a clear sign that segregation is gradually decreasing, exactly the opposite of Rusk and Orfield's hypothesis.

The New Urbanism might be summarized as the view that neighborhoods were better when porches were in the front of houses and garages were in the back.

The biggest problem with regionalism is its premise that having major metropolitan areas divided into multiple jurisdictions is "inefficient" and undesirable. Rusk and Orfield fail utterly to consider one of the seminal ideas of modern urban economics: The Tiebout Hypothesis. University of Chicago economist Charles Tiebout posited in his 1956 article "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures" that there is no objective way to determine the "right" level of public services that a local government should provide. Therefore, the optimal level of local public services is best determined through municipal competition, by which local jurisdictions offer different bundles of public goods and people express their preferences by voting with their feet.

It is not self-evident that regionalism is more efficient than municipal competition. Just as competition in the private sector keeps prices down, competition among cities, scholarly research has found, acts to keep local taxes down. Research has also found, not surprisingly, that regional government and municipal consolidations lead to higher local taxes. The federal Advisory Council on Intergovernmental Relations concluded 10 years ago that metropolitan consolidation would be "suboptimal." "A more consolidated local government structure," writes Sam Staley, "would probably decrease the ability of local governments to provide public goods efficiently and cost-effectively."

The New Urbanism

If the new liberal thinking began and ended with regionalism, it might not be worth much notice. The tradition of local home rule in America is sufficiently robust that citizens could be expected to limit or terminate regionalism whenever it reared its head. "The voters," Jane Jacobs observed in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, "sensibly decline to federate into a system where bigness means local helplessness, ruthless, oversimplified planning, and administrative chaos—for that is just what municipal bigness means today. How is helplessness against conquering planners an improvement over no planning? How is bigger administration, with labyrinths nobody can comprehend or navigate, an improvement over crazy-quilt township and suburban governments?"

But there is a second, and rather imaginative, element to the new liberal thought on cities that is rapidly building momentum throughout the country with the support of some conservatives. The second element goes by the name of "new urbanism" or "smart growth." The new urbanism might be summarized as the view that neighborhoods were better when porches were on the front of houses and garages in the back, rather than the other way around, as most suburban subdivisions are built today.

The central insight of the new urbanism is that urban form influences our social interaction and well-being. Wide streets, "dependency" on the automobile, and low-density residential development that is segregated from commercial land uses isolates suburbanites from one another. The new urbanists embrace "neotraditional" planning, a return to higher-density neighborhood designs with narrower streets, houses with front porches and smaller setbacks from the sidewalk, and mixed-use development such as corner stores and other retail outlets. A few new communities have been built as models of neotraditional design, including Kentlands (a neighborhood in Gaithersburg, Maryland), Laguna West, California, and Seaside, Florida (where *The Truman Show* was filmed).

Conservatives can largely embrace this critique (as the *American Enterprise* magazine did in a 1996

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issue), noting that conservatives like Russell Kirk were saying very much the same thing 40 years ago. After all, many of the problems that the new urbanists now decry are largely the product of a previous era of government land-use regulation and intervention. Conservatives weren't the ones who urged governments to adopt rigidly proscriptive zoning systems in the suburbs and ram the interstate highway system through our big cities.

The new urbanists are not content, however, with repealing land-use regulations that have prevented communities and builders from experimenting with neotraditional neighborhood concepts and other ideas. The new urbanism seeks to mandate high-density, neotraditional neighborhoods as the only development pattern of the future and as the way to redevelop existing cities and suburbs. They approach urban problems with an attitude that could justly be described as "Planning Über Alles."

The Cancer Within?

This movement projects a visceral hatred of suburban sprawl and its accomplice, the automobile. Sprawl is attacked in the most pungent terms imaginable. Neal Pierce, a writer on urban affairs, has called suburban sprawl "a virus eating us from the inside out." Philip Langdon (one of the new urbanists featured in the *American Enterprise*) wrote in his book *A Better Place to Live* that "the suburbs we build are fostering an unhealthy way of life," though there is no solid data to support such a claim. "Insane," "destructive," and "nightmarish" are adjectives the *Arizona Republic* used in a series deploring sprawl in Phoenix. State officials in New Mexico, where urban and suburban development occupy about 1 percent of the state's total land area, described sprawl there as a "cancer." Andres Duany, one of the leading neotraditional planners, wrote that "suburban sprawl is a cancerous growth rather than healthy growth, and it is destroying our civic life."

The intellectuals' scorn for the suburbs is nothing new. The title of a 1957 article in the *Community Planning Review*—"Hell Is a Suburb"—neatly captures their attitude. It was to counter this scorn that sociologist Herbert Gans wrote *The Levittowners* in 1969. Elite opinion at that time, Gans wrote, regarded suburbanites as "an uneducated, gullible, petty 'mass' which rejects the culture that would make it fully human, the 'good government' that would create the better community, and the proper planning that would do away with the landscape-despoiling little 'boxes' in which they live." Gans found that the typical image of the suburbanite as an isolated dullard was a crude and inaccurate caricature. "The community may displease the professional planner and the intellectual defender of cosmopolitan culture," Gans concluded, "but perhaps more than any other type of community, Levittown permits most of its residents to be what they want to be—to center their lives around the home and the family, to be among neighbors whom they can trust, to find friends to share leisure hours. . . . If suburban life was as undesirable and unhealthy as the critics charged, the suburbanites themselves were blissfully unaware of it."

Denser Is Better

Since Gans wrote *The Levittowners*, a new policy has emerged to constrain the growth of suburbs: urban growth boundaries (UGBs). UGBs are necessary, their proponents say, because land is succumbing to suburban development at a much higher rate than population growth. While rapid land conversion is not surprising in the fast-growing metropolitan areas of the Sunbelt, the phenomenon in older midwestern and northeastern cities is more illuminating. Between 1970 and 1990, for example, the population of metropolitan Chicago grew by just 4 percent, while the area of developed land grew by 55 percent. In St. Louis, regional population has grown by 17 percent since 1960, while developed land area has grown by 125 percent.

To those with apocalyptic fears for the environment, this trend portends the "paving of America," even though *all* urban and suburban development has consumed less than 5 percent of the total land area in the continental U.S. The rate at which land is being used for suburban development is comparatively small as well: The current annual rate of suburban expansion is only about 0.0006 percent of the land in the continental U.S. The discrepancy between population growth and suburban development in metropolitan areas is really a reflection of growing affluence and consumer preferences. Opinion polls show large majorities of homebuyers and would-be homebuyers prefer to live in low-density suburban communities, even if it means a longer commute to work.

Critics warn of the "paving of America," even though all urban and suburban development has consumed less than 5 percent of the total land area in the continental United States.

The critics of low-density suburban development, however, argue that the collective effects of these individual residential preferences are unacceptably harmful. Low-density development is inefficient or "unsustainable" because it imposes much higher costs on the public sector (for roads, sewers, water lines, and so forth) than compact development. The claim that "growth doesn't pay for

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itself" has become axiomatic in urban-policy debates, though the scholarship suggests that this claim is highly debatable and location-specific. A 1993 Brookings Institution survey of the research on the issue concluded that sprawl and other "variations in urban form" appear to have "modest effects on infrastructure costs." And just as most liberal critics of urban schools seldom consider school choice as a remedy, the critics of suburban development seldom entertain the idea of privatizing infrastructure, which would immediately sort out much of the cost controversy.

Sprawl is said to be unsustainable also because low-density living patterns leads to dramatically higher traffic congestion and "auto dependency." During the 1980s, for example, U.S. population increased by about 10 million, but the number of autos increased by more than 20 million. Similarly, over the last 20 years the number of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) has grown four times faster than the population.

But once again, this measure is misleading: It is a measure more of affluence and changing work habits than of the effect of residential density. A close look at travel data from the U.S. Department of Transportation shows that average commute-to-work times have not increased appreciably in any urban area over the last 20 years. Very few people are driving longer distances to work precisely because the suburbs have generated employment for many of those who live there. Traffic congestion is rising because more people are driving and drivers take more non-work-related trips than they used to. The majority of the increase in VMT has taken place among women who have joined the work force in large numbers over the last 20 years and minorities who have entered the middle class and acquired cars. Enlightened people used to celebrate social trends like these.

The drive to curtail suburban development regardless of the facts is building momentum behind the banner of "smart growth." Smart growth sets boundaries on urban growth by regulating development according to a regional master plan. Sometimes, as in the case of Maryland, state and local authorities refuse to extend public infrastructure beyond a certain radius from downtown. A developer can in theory still build beyond the specified radius if it is willing to pay the full cost of infrastructure for new development, but state transportation planners actively discourage it. The confluence of "smart growth" and regionalism tends to attract a broad coalition of environmentalists, mass-transit advocates, urban planners, downtown political and business interests, and suburbanites happy to shut the development door behind themselves.

Laboratories of Bureaucracy

By far the favorite urban laboratory for regionalism and new urbanist and "smart growth" ideas is Portland, Oregon. That state embraced urban growth boundaries 25 years ago, but fully implemented the policy only in the last few years through its "Metro 2040" plan. Portland's strict urban growth boundary is designed to double the density of its metro area over the next 40 years, and a powerful elected regional government (known simply as Metro) has the clout to enforce the plan. The city has already invested several billion dollars in light rail and plans to force people out of their cars and onto public transit by limiting

Seaside, Florida, is a model of "neotraditional" town design, which tries to supplant the suburban car culture with high-density zoning and pedestrian-friendly streets. But are we ready to give up big lawns and drive-thru service?

Left photo by Alex S. MacLean; right photo by Steven Brooke

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new road-building and deliberately increasing traffic congestion over the next 40 years.

Portland has become the Potemkin Village of contemporary urban planning. Neal Pierce touts the Portland region as "a model of world-class, citizen-based planning." Urban planners from around the nation flock to Portland like miracle-seekers to Lourdes; Alan Ehrenhalt noted in *Governing* magazine that "it sometimes seems as if the whole country is looking to Portland as a role model for 21st century urban development." It is impossible to attend a conference on urban planning issues without hearing hosannas for Portland's ostensible enlightenment.

A closer look suggests, however, that Portland's 40-year plan is headed for trouble. In order to accommodate an estimated 700,000 to 1.1 million new residents within the existing growth boundary over the next 40 years, the plan attempts to impose much higher residential densities on existing neighborhoods. Metro wants to shrink the average lot size for single-family homes by almost a third, from about 9,000 square feet to 6,700 square feet. Plans for home sites in some neighborhoods call for home lots as small as 2,900 square feet. Planners have also proposed high-density multifamily housing such as row houses, which have never been popular anywhere in the West. "A nation in love with truck-sized sport utility vehicles," Tim Ferguson observed in *Forbes*, "is unlikely to embrace the housing equivalent of an Escort."

To preserve land for new housing and businesses, the Metro agency will not allow any "big box" retailers such as Walmart, Price Club, or Home Depot to build anywhere. In fact, it won't permit any retail development larger than 30 acres, because it requires too much parking space and causes too much driving. This way, planners say, they'll have room for the next Intel that wants to move in. Portland's planners are untroubled that they are substituting political decisions for marketplace decisions, even though the track record of politicized decisions about economic development is abysmal. Housing prices in Portland have soared in recent years. Metro's proponents blame the booming economy, but skeptics point out that other western cities with even faster population and job growth but without anti-sprawl controls, such as Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City, have experienced much lower inflation in home prices.

At a time when the world is deregulating markets for fundamental goods such as telecommunications, transportation, banking, and energy production and distribution, it is paradoxical that we should be considering stringent new regulations in the marketplace for land and housing. The new urbanists are telling us, in effect, that we had it all wrong before, but *this time* we know how to do it right. They have little regard for the spontaneous nature of neighborhood character or any appreciation for the unintended consequences that such ambitious long-range planning will generate. Even if the plan works exactly as intended, it is unlikely to be popular.

Randal O'Toole of the Thoreau Institute noticed that, while Portland residents think the plan will ease traffic congestion, the plan actually intends to make it dramatically worse. Throughout the West, Los Angeles is reviled as the epitome of sprawl and congested roadways. An anti-growth group in Phoenix, for example, calls itself "Not

High Demand for Neotraditional?

Neotraditional neighborhoods such as Kentlands, Maryland; Seaside, Florida; or Laguna West, California, look intriguing, but they are not setting homebuyers on fire. Homes in Laguna West, near Sacramento, have sold very slowly, and the community has not evolved according to the original plan. Homebuyers were not enthusiastic about having a transit stop without parking in the middle of their neighborhood (people were supposed to walk to the transit stop, but of course most drove and parked in the adjacent neighborhood), so the residents demanded that the transit stop be moved away from the neighborhood, and have conventional parking added. Mixed-use retail and commercial development has lagged as well. The first commercial outlet in the neighborhood was a Jiffy Lube—probably not what the planners had in mind. Laguna West may yet succeed, but it will not live up to its original hype. Meanwhile, conventional suburban developments in the Sacramento area have sold out quickly.

It is interesting that the makers of the recent film *The Truman Show* chose Seaside, Florida, as the backdrop for a story about the artificiality of life. Joe Morgenstern noted in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Truman's candy-colored home lacks detail; it's a set for a TV show, after all, and this an idealization of shallow ideas. Truman's town, Seahaven, lacks variety and texture; its blank-faced neo-Victorian houses suggest a slapdash backlot evocation of America at the turn of the century. Scarier still, the movie's exteriors were shot in the all-too-real town of Seaside, Florida, one of those planned communities where personal taste has been excised from the plan."

Ouch!

In the fullness of time, the new urbanism may come to resemble the New Coke. Just as new urbanists point to surveys showing homebuyers preferring neotraditional designs, Coca-Cola had found during thousands of blind taste tests that consumers expressed a strong preference for the New Coke formula. When it was brought to the market in the real world, however, consumers famously rejected it. Neotraditional designs should certainly be allowed by land-use regulators, but planners should be open to the probability that such designs are a boutique preference.

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L.A.," and the original movement for growth control in Oregon in the 1970s adopted the slogan, "Don't Californicate Oregon." In fact, the Los Angeles region is more than twice as densely populated as the Portland metro area, and one reason for L.A.'s traffic congestion is that the area, surprisingly, has fewer road miles per capita than most major cities, including New York City.

What will happen over 40 years as Portland's density rises while the region deliberately avoids road-building? Even Metro predicts that the amount of congested roadway in the region will more than triple, while the proportion of people taking mass transit to get around will rise to only 6 percent of all trips. And these are the *optimistic* forecasts; light rail ridership so far is barely half of original projections, and two-thirds of the light rail riders are former bus passengers. O'Toole found a curious admission in an obscure Metro report. "In public discussions we gather that Los Angeles represents a future to be avoided," reads *Metro Measured*, yet "with respect to density and road per capita mileage it displays an investment pattern we desire to replicate."

A Popular Backlash

Not surprisingly, a backlash has begun in many Portland neighborhoods. West Linn citizens voted 4 to 1 against Metro 2040, and the close-in suburb of Milwaukie recalled its mayor and two city council members last year because they supported Metro's plans to densify Milwaukie neighborhoods. The Multnomah Neighborhood Association is distributing lawn signs reading, "Save Our Neighborhoods: Rethink Zoning." Voters rejected the latest bond measure to fund rail transit, and an initiative to abolish the Metro agency and restrict future attempts at regional government is being circulated by Oregon Taxpayers United, a grass-roots group that has launched several successful initiatives in Oregon. O'Toole has joined forces with a citizens group called "Ortem" (Metro spelled backwards) that opposes the Metro 2040 plan.

Local attempts to rein in existing regional governments and prevent new ones from forming, however, may be frustrated by the federal government. Although the HUD's *State of the Cities* report makes no mention of regionalism or "smart growth" ideas, the federal government fully supports regionalism and "smart growth" through the stealth mechanism of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA). ISTEA does more than earmark federal transportation spending for mass-transit projects and local roads. It also mandates regional transportation planning on behalf of goals that serve as the opening wedge for the agendas of environmentalists and new urbanists. This is why ISTEA is heavy on lightly-used rail transit projects and slights road-building in favor of bureaucracy-intensive "congestion management plans."

Although ISTEA enthusiasts argue that the federal interstate highway system represented a massive intrusion by Washington into the hearts of our cities, they now propose to continue Washington's massive intrusion into the hearts of our cities on behalf of a supposedly more enlightened understanding of mobility. Here's a better idea: Cut the federal gas tax and let states and local governments make their own transportation policy. Experiments in "congestion pricing" (charging tolls according to user demand), transit deregulation, and privatization of infrastructure—all notably missing from new urbanist prescriptions—would offer a wide variety of models for urban planners to learn from, and would relieve planners from the impossible burden of finding all the right answers for every urban condition.

The latest liberal ideas to fix cities go under the banner of the *new* urbanism, yet it represents a 19th-century model for 21st-century needs. For all the concern for the supposed social dysfunction of the suburbs, it is disappointing that neither the regionalists nor the new urbanists recognize that the moral aspects of urban life have contributed so much to decline in the central cities. Regional approaches to metropolitan problems and new urban forms of development may make sense under certain circumstances. But they are increasingly offered as a panacea for urban problems, and their popularity is spreading. At the end of the day, however, we will find that suburban renewal has worked no better than urban renewal before it.

***Steven Hayward**, a Bradley Fellow at The Heritage Foundation, is the author of* Churchill on Leadership *(Prima Publishing).*

Resources on Urban Growth

Reason Public Policy Institute's Urban Futures Program • Contains a useful bibliography of scholarly research on a wide range of urban issues. Web site: www.urbanfutures.org.

Thoreau Institute • Offers Randal O'Toole's critique of the new urbanism and Portland's 40-year plan. Web site: www.teleport.com/~rot/.

Cascade Policy Institute • Environment adviser John Charles is a prime local critic of Metro 2040. Web site: www.CascadePolicy.org.

Wendell Cox Consultancy • Offers a revealing comparison of Portland and Seattle, showing that "unplanned" Seattle performs better than Portland on several measures of growth management. Web site: www.PublicPurpose.com.

Portland's Metro Agency • You can download the Metro 2040 plan itself, along with other materials including Metro's rebuttal to criticisms from O'Toole and Charles. Web site: www.multnomah.lib.or.us/metro.

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The Madness of the American Family

In a recent talk, author and social critic ***Midge Decter*** *asked why the wealthiest and healthiest country on earth has such nutty ideas about the family*

The idea of talking about the subject called "family" always puts me in mind of a line from the ancient Greek playwright Euripides. "Whom the Gods would destroy," he said, "they first make mad." Now, to be sure, there are no gods—there is only God—and even if there were, you would have to think that, far from destroying us, they are busily arranging things very nicely for us. Nor do I think that American society has gone mad, exactly. Look around you at this magnificent country: You would have to say that somebody is surely doing something right.

Nevertheless, the ghost of that ancient Greek keeps whispering his words of ageless experience in my ear. If we Americans cannot be said to have gone mad, we have certainly been getting nuttier by the day.

Take one example of our nuttiness. We are healthier than people have ever been in all of human history. Just to list the possibly debilitating diseases that American children need never again experience—measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, smallpox, scarlet fever, polio—is to understand why we have begun to confront the issue of how to provide proper amenities to the fast-growing number of people who are being blessed with a vigorous old age.

And yet, as it seems, from morning until night we think of nothing but

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our health and all the potential threats to it. We measure and count and think about everything we put into our mouths. While we are speculating about which of the many beautiful places there will be for us to retire to, we are at the same time obsessed with all the substances and foodstuffs that are lying in wait to kill us, and try out each new magical prescription for the diet that will keep us ever young and beautiful. This has gone so far that, for example, not long ago a group of pediatricians had to issue a warning to new mothers that, far from beneficial, a low-fat diet was in fact quite injurious to infants and toddlers.

And as if an obsession with nutrition were not enough, every day millions upon millions of us whom life has seen fit to save from hard labor find ourselves instead, like so many blinded horses of olden times, daily enchained to our exercise treadmills.

So we treat our health as if it were a disease and the benign conditions of our lives as if they were so many obstacles to our well-being.

And if that is nutty, what shall we say about finding ourselves engaged in discussing something called the family? How on earth, if the gods are not out to destroy us, have we got ourselves into *this* fix? Talking about the family should be like talking about the earth itself: interesting to observe in all its various details—after all, what else are many if not most great novels about?—but hardly up for debate. And yet people just like you and me nowadays find themselves doing precisely that: Is it good for you? Is it necessary, especially for children? And—craziest of all—what is it?

In our everyday private lives, of course, we drive around in, or fly around in, and otherwise make household use of the products of various technologies of a complexity that is positively mind-boggling without giving it a second thought. Yet at the same time, millions among us who have attended, or who now attend, universities find it useful to take formal courses in something called "family relations," as if this were a subject requiring the most expert kind of technical training. And in our lives as a national community we call conferences, engage in public programs, create new organizations, and beyond that publish and read several libraries of books devoted entirely to questions about the family—not to speak of the fact that here I am as well this evening, offering you some further conversation on the subject.

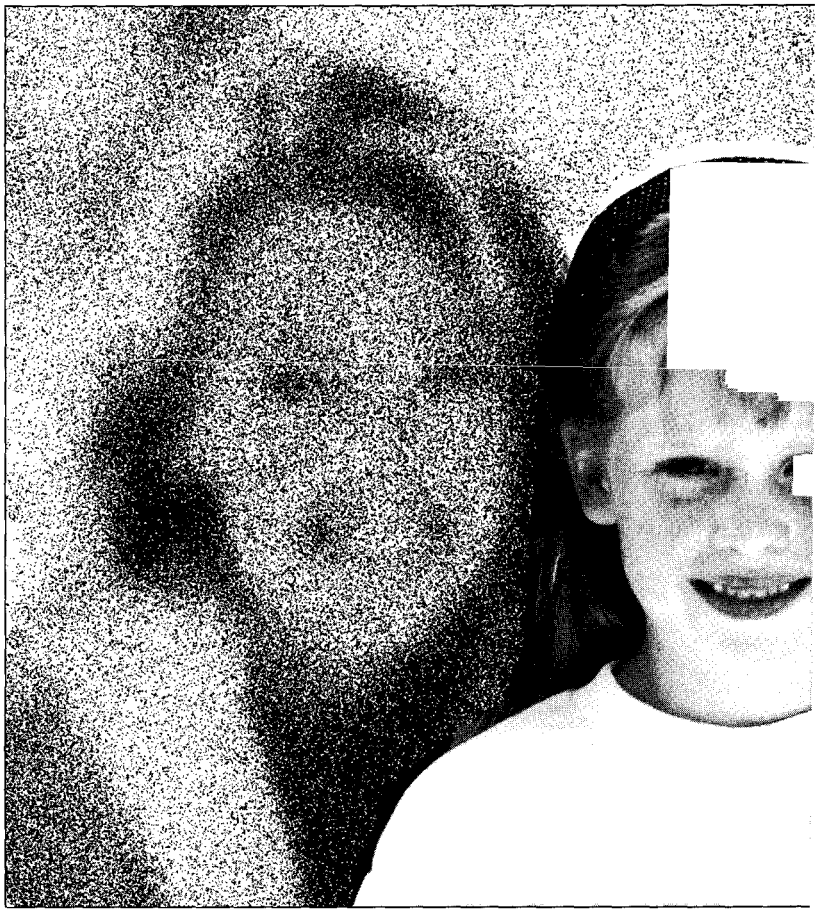
I look around this room and wonder, how on earth have we come to this place, you and I? How did the wealthiest, healthiest, and luckiest people who have ever lived get to such a point? It is as if, in payment for our good fortune, we had been struck by some kind of slow-acting but in the long run lethal plague. This plague is a malady we must diagnose and put a name to if we are ever as a nation to return to our God-given senses.

Where did the idea that the family might somehow be an object of debate and choice come from? It is never easy, as epidemiologists will tell you, to trace the exact origin of a plague. Who exactly is our Typhoid Mary?

I can't say I know, precisely, but I knew we were in trouble back in the late 1950s when I picked up *Esquire* magazine one day and read an essay about his generation written by a young man still in university. The writer concluded with the impassioned assertion that if he thought he might end up some day like his own father, working hard every day to make a nice home for the wife and kids, he would slit his throat. *Slit his throat.* Those were his exact words.

Now, I might not have paid close attention to the sentiment expressed by this obviously spoiled and objectionable brat were it not for two things: First, we were in those days hearing a lot from their teachers about just how brilliant and marvelous was the new generation of students in the universities, and second, *Esquire* was in those days known for its claim to have its finger on the cultural pulse. Thus, this was a young man whose mountainous ingratitude was worth paying a little attention to.

And sure enough, not too much later, what we know as the 1960s began to happen. Enough said. Should it, then, have come as a surprise that in



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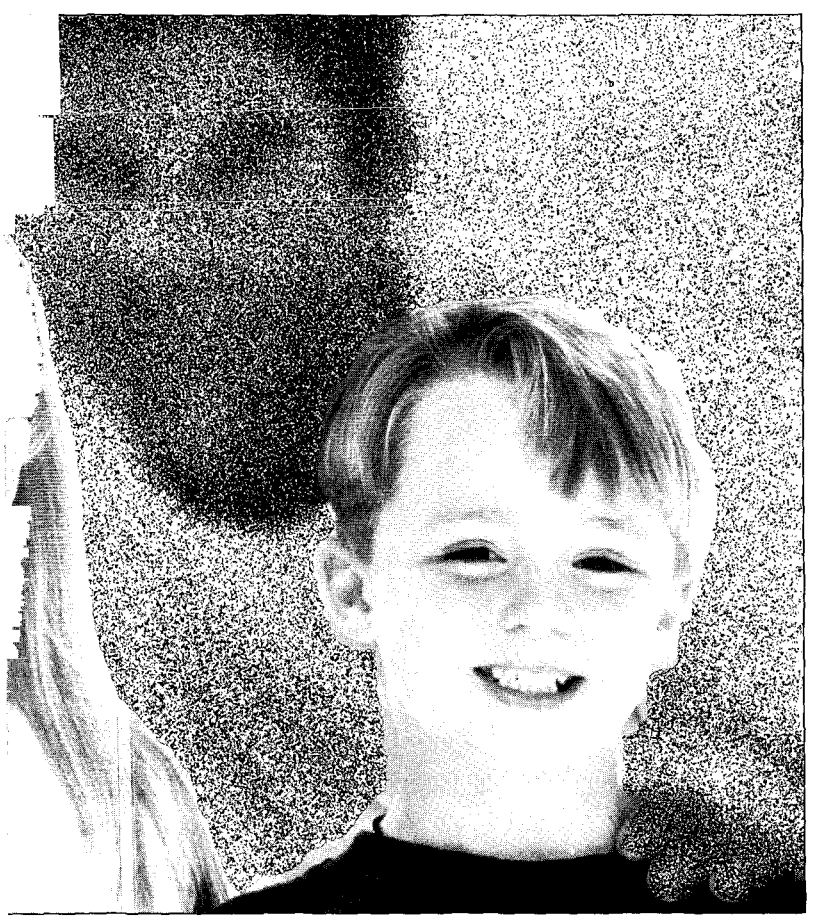
short order that young author's female counterparts began in their own way to declare that throat-cutting would be the proper response to the prospect of ending up like their mothers? Well, surprise or no, the plague was now upon us for fair.

The End of Responsibility

Am I trying to suggest that the only course of social health is to live exactly as one's parents did? Of course not. The United States is a country whose character and achievements have depended precisely on people's striking out for new territories—actual territories and territories of the mind as well. We have not lived as our parents did, and we do not expect our children—or, anyway, our grandchildren—to live as we do.

Several years ago I was privileged to attend my grandfather's hundredth birthday party. When we asked him what, looking back, was the most important thing that had ever happened to him, without a moment's hesitation he astonished us by answering that the most important thing that ever happened to him was being privileged to witness the introduction of the use of electricity into people's homes. And now I see my own grandchildren, even the youngest of them, sitting hunched over their keyboards, fingers flying, communing with unseen new-found friends in far-flung places and giving this new possibility not a second thought.

In the 1960s, young men began to cut out of their responsibilities, while young women began to fall under the influence of a movement that was equating marriage with chattel slavery.



So of course we do not live as our parents lived, but that young man writing in *Esquire* was saying something else: Underneath the posturing, he was saying that he did not wish ever to become a husband and father. And the raging young women who came along soon after him were saying they, for their part, would be all too happy to be getting along without him.

And what, finally, when the dust of all these newfound declarations of independence began to settle, was the result of this new turmoil? The young men began to cut out—cut out of responsibility, cut out of service to their country, and cut out of the terms of everyday, ordinary life. They said they were against something they called "the system." But what, in the end, did they mean by that? Insofar as the system was represented by business and professional life, most of them after a brief fling as make-believe outcasts cut back into that aspect of the system very nicely; but insofar as it meant accepting the terms of ordinary daily life, of building and supporting a home and family, they may no longer have been prepared to slit their throats, but they would for a long time prove to be at best pretty skittish about this last act of becoming grown men.

And their girlfriends and lovers? They, on their side, were falling under the influence of a movement that was equating marriage and motherhood with chattel slavery. "We want," said Gloria Steinem, one of this movement's most celebrated spokeswomen ("a saint" is what Newsweek magazine once called her), "to be the husbands we used to marry."

Let us ponder that remark for a moment: "We want to be the husbands we used to marry." Underlying the real ideology of the women's movement, sometimes couched in softer language and sometimes in uglier, is the proposition that the differences between men and women are merely culturally imposed—culturally imposed, moreover, for nefarious purposes. That single proposition underlies what claims to be no more than the movement's demands for equal treatment, and it constitutes the gravamen of the teaching of women's studies in all our universities.

And need I say that it has been consequential throughout our society? I don't, I think, have to go through the whole litany of the women's complaints. Nor do I have to go into detail about their

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huge political success in convincing the powers that be that they represented half the country's population, and thus obtaining many truly disruptive legislative remedies for their would-be sorrows.

Among the remedies that follow from the proposition that the differences between men and women are merely culturally imposed has been that of letting women in on the strong-man action. Why, it was successfully argued, should they not be firemen, policemen, coal miners, sports reporters—in many ways most significant of all—combat soldiers?

The Soldier and the Baby-Tender

At the outset of the Gulf War, early in that first phase of it called Desert Shield, the *New York Post* carried on its front page a newsphoto—it may have appeared in many papers, or at least it should have—illustrating a story about the departure for Saudi Arabia of a group of reservists. The picture was of a young woman in full military regalia, including helmet, planting a farewell kiss on the brow of an infant at most three months old being held in the arms of its father. The photo spoke volumes about where this society has allowed itself to get dragged to and was in its way as obscene as anything that has appeared in that cesspool known as *Hustler* magazine. It should have been framed and placed on the desk of the president, the secretary of defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and every liberal Senator in the United States Congress.

What could be a more radical idea than that there is no natural difference between men and women?

That photo was not about the achievement of women's equality; it was about the nuttiness—in this case, perhaps the proper word *is* madness—that has overtaken all too many American families. For the household in which—let's use the social scientists' pompous term for it—"the sexual differentiation of roles" has grown so blurry that you can't tell the soldier from the baby-tender without a scorecard is a place of profound disorder. No wonder we are a country with a low birthrate and a high divorce rate.

We see milder forms of this disorder all over the place, especially in cases where young mothers have decreed that mothers and fathers are to be indistinguishable as to their—my favorite word—roles. Again, you cannot tell—or rather, you are not supposed to be able to tell—the mommy from the daddy. The child, of course, knows who is what. No baby or little kid who is hungry or frightened or hurting ever calls for his daddy in the middle of the night. He might *get* his daddy, but it is unlikely that that would have been his intention.

Everybody has always known such things: What is a husband, what is a wife; what is a mother, what is a father. How have we come to the place where they are open for debate? "Untune that string," says Shakespeare, "and hark what discord follows."

It is not all that remarkable, for instance, that there should have been the kind of women's movement that sprang up among us. There have from time to time throughout recorded history been little explosions of radicalism, of refusal to accept the limits of human existence, and what could be a more radical idea than that there is no natural difference between the sexes? Just to say the words is to recognize that what we have here is a rebellion not against a government or a society, but against the very constitution of our beings, we men and women.

The question is, what caused such an idea to reverberate as it did among two generations of the most fortunate women who ever lived? As for their men, what idea lay at the bottom of their response to all this we do not quite know, for they giggled nervously and for the most part remained silent. But it is not difficult to see that if the movement's ideas represented an assault on the age-old definition of their manhood, it also relieved them of a great burden of responsibility: Seeing that their services as protectors and defenders and breadwinners had been declared no longer essential, they were now free—in some cases literally, in some cases merely emotionally—to head for the hills.

Since the condition of families depends to a considerable degree on the condition of marriages, small wonder, then, that the subject of family has been put up for debate.

Most recently, we are being asked to consider whether two lesbians or two male homosexuals should not also be recognized as a family. Oftentimes the ostensible issue centers on money; that is, spousal benefits for one's homosexual mate. But actually, as we know, what is being demanded is about far more than money.

Money is easy to think about; that's why the homosexual-rights movement has placed such emphasis on this particular legislative campaign. But what is really being sought is that society should confer upon homosexual unions the same legitimacy as has always been conferred upon heterosexual ones.

What comes next, of course, is the legal adoption of children. Why not a family with two daddies? After all, some unfortunates among us don't even have one. (Lesbians, of course, suffer no such complications. All their babies require for a daddy is a syringe. Thus, we have that little classic of children's literature, to be found in the libraries of the nation's public schools, entitled *Heather Has Two Mommies.*)

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In other words, when it comes to families, any arrangement is considered as good as any other.

People don't pick their professions that way; they don't decide where to live that way; they don't furnish their lives or their houses that way; they don't even dress themselves that way . . . but families? Why not? Aren't they, after all, no more than the result of voluntary agreements between two private individuals? And anyway, don't people have rights? Who are their fellow citizens to tell them how to live and decide that one thing is good and another is bad?

Such questions explain why it was that in the 1970s a famous White House Conference on the Family, called primarily to discuss the crisis in the inner cities and packed full of so-called family experts and advocates from all over the country, could not even begin to mount a discussion, let alone provide a report, because from the very first day they could not even reach agreement on the definition of the word "family."

You Can't Fool Mother Nature

The question is, how did we as a society ever come to this disordered place? For one thing, what has encouraged us to imagine that anything is possible if we merely will it to be? And for another, how have we strayed this far from the wisdom so painfully earned by all those who came before us and prepared the earth to receive us? I ask these questions in no polemical spirit, because few of us have not in one way or another been touched by them, if not in our own households, then in the lives of some of those near and dear to us.

What is it, in short, that so many Americans have forgotten, or have never learned, about the nature of human existence?

One thing they have forgotten—or perhaps never learned—is that you can't fool Mother Nature. If you try to do so, you sicken and die, spiritually speaking—like those little painted turtles that used to be a tourist novelty for children and, because their shells were covered in paint, could never live beyond a few days.

The land of limitless freedom, as so many among us are now beginning to discover, turns out to be nothing more than the deep muck and mire of Self.

Well, we do not, like those novelty turtles, literally die: On the contrary, as I have said, we have been granted the possibility of adding years to our lives; but far too many of us, especially the young people among us, live what are at bottom unnatural lives. Too many young women, having recovered from their seizure of believing that they were required to become Masters of the Universe, cannot find men to marry them, while the men on their side cannot seem to find women to marry. Both grope around, first bewildered and then made sour by what is happening to them. And there is nothing in the culture around them—that nutty, nutty culture—to offer medicine for their distemper.

What is it Mother Nature knows that so many of us no longer do? It is that marriage and family are not a choice like, say, deciding where to go and whom to befriend and how to make a living. Together, marriage and parenthood are the rock on which human existence stands.

Different societies may organize their families differently—or so, at least, the anthropologists used to take great pleasure in telling us (I myself have my doubts)—and they may have this or that kinship system or live beneath this or that kind of roof. But consider: In societies, whether primitive or advanced, that have no doubt about how to define the word "family," every child is born to two people, one of his own sex and one of the other, to whom his life is as important as their own and who undertake to instruct him in the ways of the world around him.

Consider this again for a moment: *Every child is born to two people, one of his own sex and one of the other, to whom his life is as important as their own and who undertake to instruct him in the ways of the world around him.* Can you name the social reformer who could dream of a better arrangement than that?

The Swamp of Self

Are there, then, no violations of this arrangement? Among the nature-driven families I am talking about are there no cruel fathers or selfish and uncaring mothers? Of course there are. I have said that family is a rock, not the Garden of Eden; and a rock, as we know, can sometimes be a far from comfortable place to be. Off the coast of San Francisco there used to be a prison they called "the rock," and that is not inapt imagery for some families I can think of.

But even in benign families there are, of course, stresses and strains. To cite only one example, it takes a long time, if not forever, for, say, a late-blooming child, or a child troubled or troublesome in some other way, to live down his past with his own family, even should he become the world's greatest living brain surgeon. Families are always, and often quite unforgivingly, the people Who Knew You When. So, as I said, the rock of family can sometimes have a pretty scratchy surface.

But there is one thing that living on a rock does for you: It keeps you out of the swamps. The most dangerous of these swamps is a place of limitless and willfully defined individual freedom.

The land of limitless freedom, as so many among us are now beginning to discover, turns out

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to be nothing other than the deep muck and mire of Self. And there is no place more airless, more sunk in black boredom, than the land of Self, and no place more difficult to be extricated from. How many among us these days are stuck there, seeking for phony excitements and emotions, flailing their way from therapy to therapy, from pounding pillows to primal screaming to ingesting drugs to God knows what else, changing their faces and bodies, following the dictates first of this guru and then of that, and all the while sinking deeper and deeper into a depressing feeling of disconnection they cannot give a name to?

The only escape from the swamp of Self is the instinctual and lifelong engagement in the fate of others. Now, busying oneself with politics or charity—both of which are immensely worthy communal undertakings involving the needs and desires of others—cannot provide the escape I am talking about. For both, however outwardly directed, are voluntary. The kind of engagement I mean is the involuntary discovery that there are lives that mean as much to you as your own, and in some cases—I am referring, of course, to your children and their children and their children after them—there are lives that mean more to you than your own. In short, the discovery that comes with being an essential member of a family.

To become a family is to lose some part of one's private existence and to be joined in what was brilliantly called "the great chain of being."

I do not think it is an exaggeration to use the word "discovery." No matter how ardently a young man and woman believe they wish to spend their lives with one another, and no matter how enthusiastically they greet the knowledge that they are to have a baby, they do not undertake either of these things in full knowledge of the commitment they are undertaking. They nod gravely at the words "for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health," but they do not know—not really, not deep down—that they are embarked upon a long, long, and sometimes arduous and even unpleasant journey.

I think this may be truer of women than of men. A woman holding her first-born in her arms, for instance, is someone who for the first time can truly understand her own mother and the meaning of the fact that she herself had been given life. This is not necessarily an easy experience, especially if her relations with her mother have been in some way painful to her; but even if they have not, this simple recognition can sometimes be quite overwhelming. That, in my opinion, is why so many first-time mothers become temporarily unbalanced.

I cannot, of course, speak for the inner life of her husband; his experience is bound to be a different one. But the panic that so often and so famously overtakes a first-time expectant father is surely related to it. To become a family is to lose some part of one's private existence and to be joined in what was so brilliantly called "the great chain of being."

In short, being the member of a family does not make you happy; it makes you human.

One Choice Among Many?

All this should be a very simple matter; God knows, it's been going on long enough. So why have we fallen into such a state of confusion?

The answer, I think, lies in the question. By which I mean that we Americans living in the second half of the 20th century are living as none others have lived before. Even the poor among us enjoy amenities that were once not available to kings. We live with the expectation that the babies born to us will survive. The death of an infant or a child is an unbearable experience. Yet go visit a colonial graveyard and read the gravestones: Our forefathers upon this land lived with the experience, year after year after year, of burying an infant—lived two weeks, lived four months, lived a year. How many burials did it take to be granted a surviving offspring?

I am not speaking of prehistoric times, but of 200 years ago. Two hundred years, my friends, is but a blink of history's eye. Could any of us survive such an experience? I doubt it.

Even a hundred years ago—*half* a blink of history's eye—people lived with kinds of hardship only rarely known among us now. Read the letters of the Victorians (fortunately for our instruction in life, people used to write a lot of letters; those who come after us, with our phone calls and e-mail, will know so little about us). They were sick *all the time.* Or take a more pleasant example, provided by my husband, the music nut: We can sit down in the comfort of home every afternoon and listen to works of music their own composers may never have heard performed and that not so long ago people would travel across Europe to hear a single performance of.

So we live as no others who came before us were privileged to do. We live with the bounties of the universe that have been unlocked by the scientists and engineers and then put to use by those old swashbucklers with names like Carnegie and Edison and Ford—and, yes, Gates—who were seeking their own fortunes and in the process made ours as well. Moreover, not long from now, we are told, there will be nearly one million Americans one hundred years old or more.

We live, too—and should not permit ourselves to forget it—with another kind of bounty: We are

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the heirs of a political system that, despite a number of threatened losses of poise and balance, has remained the most benign and just, and even the most stable, in the world.

The truth is that precisely because we are living under an endless shower of goodies, we are as a people having a profoundly difficult time staying in touch with the sources of our being. That is why so many young women were so easily hoodwinked into believing that marriage and motherhood were what they liked to call "options," just one choice among many. That is why so many young men were so easily convinced to settle for the sudden attack of distemper afflicting the women whom fate intended for them. That is why so many people of good will find it difficult to argue with the idea that homosexual mating is no different from their own—everybody to his own taste, and who's to say, especially when it comes to sex, that anything is truer, or better, or more natural than anything else?

In short, because God has permitted us to unlock so many secrets of His universe, we are in constant danger of fancying that any limits upon us are purely arbitrary and we have the power to lift them. In the past half-century, what has not been tried out, by at least some group or other in our midst, in the way of belief and ritual or—horrible word—lifestyle? We have watched the unfolding of catalogues-full of ancient and newly made-up superstitions, the spread of fad medicines and "designer" drugs (each year, it seems, produces a new one of these). Lately we have seen beautiful young children, children living in the most advanced civilization on earth, painfully and hideously mutilating their bodies in the name, they will tell you, of fashion.

All this, I believe, stems from the same profound muddle that has left us as a society groping for a definition of the word "family." Maybe people are just not constituted to be able to live with the ease and wealth and health that have been granted to us.

But this would be a terrible thing to have to believe, and I do not believe it, and neither do you, or you would not be here this evening. As Albert Einstein once said, the Lord God can be subtle, but He is not malicious. What does seem to be a fair proposition, however, is that given the whole preceding history of mankind, to live as we do takes more than a bit of getting used to. It takes, indeed, some serious spiritual discipline.

Wisdom and Gratitude

I believe that two things will help us to be restored from our current nuttiness. The first is for us, as a people and a culture, to recapture our respect for the wisdom of our forbears. That wisdom was earned in suffering and trial; we throw it away—and many of us have thrown it away—at their and our very great peril. The second is a strong and unending dose of gratitude: the kind of gratitude that people ought to feel for the experience of living in freedom; the kind of gratitude the mother of a newborn feels as she counts the fingers and toes of the tiny creature who has been handed to her; the kind of gratitude we feel when someone we care about has passed through some danger; the kind of gratitude we experience as we walk out into the sunshine of a beautiful day, which is in fact none other than gratitude for the gift of being alive.

All around us these days, especially and most fatefully among the young women in our midst, there are signs of a surrender to nature and the common sense that goes with it. The famous anthropologist Margaret Mead—a woman who in her own time managed to do quite a good deal of damage to the national ethos—did once say something very wise and prophetic. She said that the real crimp in a woman's plans for the future came not from the cries but from the smiles of her baby.

How many young women lawyers and executives have been surprised to discover, first, that they could not bear to remain childless, and second, that they actually preferred hanging around with their babies to preparing a brief or attending a high-level meeting? One could weep for the difficulty they had in discovering the true longings of their hearts. Next—who knows—they may even begin to discover that having a real husband and being a real wife in return may help to wash away all that bogus posturing rage that has been making

Being a member of a family does not make you happy; it makes you human.

them so miserable to themselves and others.

When that happens, we may be through debating and discussing and defining and redefining the term "family" and begin to relearn the very, very old lesson that life has limits and that only by escaping Self and becoming part of the onrushing tide of generations can we ordinary humans give our lives their intended full meaning. We have been endowed by our Creator not only with unalienable rights but with the knowledge that is etched into our very bones.

All we have to do is listen. And say thank you. And pray.

Midge Decter, *a trustee of The Heritage Foundation, is the author of many books and articles of political and social commentary. She delivered this address in Denver on July 9, 1998, as part of Heritage's 25th anniversary lecture series.*

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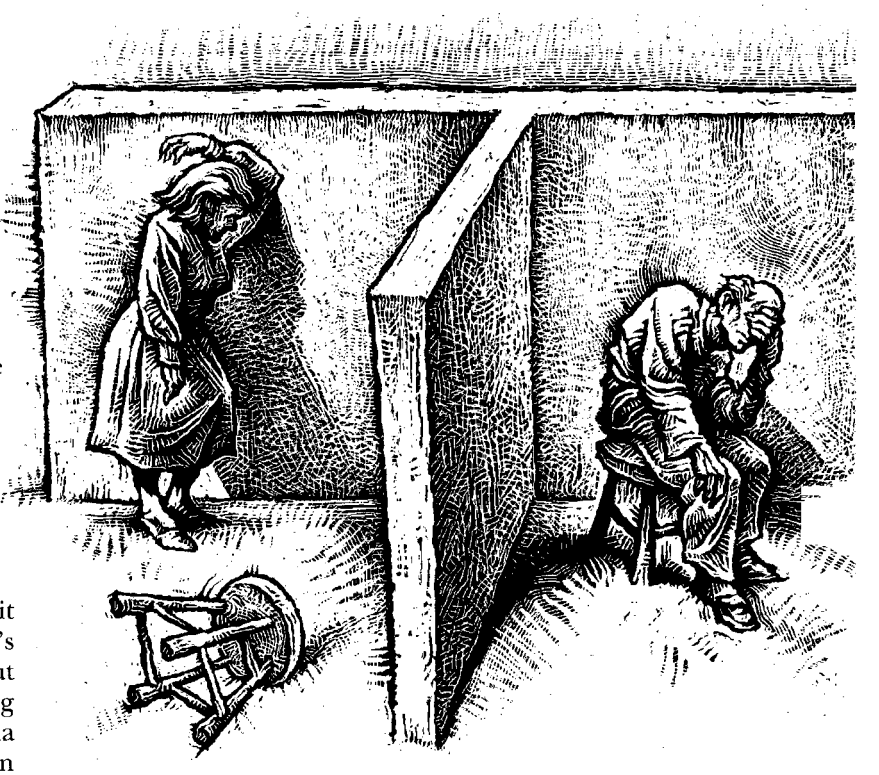
Bawling Alone

An epidemic of clinical depression in the midst of material prosperity can be related to the breakdown of family and the decline of civic virtue

By William R. Mattox Jr.



Most people stay current by reading the morning paper, watching the evening news, or surfing the World Wide Web. But for procrastinators like me, the best way to stay current is to read back issues of the *Futurist* magazine.

I've been doing that a lot recently. And I am happy to report that a growing number of scholars are beginning to take seriously the study of happiness, joy, and life satisfaction. Or so the *Futurist* observes in a recent feature on "the science of happiness."

Now, it might be tempting to view the pursuit of happiness within academia as a sign that today's scholars have run out of problems to consider. But the scientific interest in happiness is actually being driven in part by what University of Pennsylvania psychology professor Martin Seligman calls an "epidemic" of clinical depression.

According to Seligman, who was recently named president of the American Psychological Association, an American's odds of suffering clinical depression at some point in his or her lifetime is now significantly higher than at any other time in this century. For example, only 1 percent of women born around the time of World War I experienced severe depression at some point in their lives. But with each succeeding generation, this percentage has risen steadily to the point that 12 to 15 percent of Americans born in the mid-1970s, the cohort now in the high-depression years of late adolescence and early adulthood, have already experienced at least one bout of serious depression.

That America is now in the throes of a Great (Clinical) Depression seems completely at odds with our material well-being. As Sir John Templeton notes in his latest book, *Is Progress Speeding Up? Our Multiplying Multitudes of Blessings*, "People today are better fed, better clothed, better housed, and better educated than at any previous time in history." Moreover, in nearly every material domain, including working conditions, food production, housing standards, quality of health care, life expectancy, environmental safety, and computer technology, Templeton says, the rate of progress is accelerating. In other words, things aren't just getting better, they are getting better and better at a faster and faster rate.

So, if we've got it so good, why do so many Americans feel so bad? Most research on depres-

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sion approaches this question from a nonhistorical "micro" perspective. That is, in seeking to identify causes of depression, factors like "loss of a loved one," "job loss," "serious health problems," or other adversities are commonly cited. While these correlations may explain why certain individuals in any historical period fall into depression, they do little to explain why other individuals facing the same adversities do not fall into depression. Nor do they explain why "macro" rates of depression vary over time in seemingly inexplicable ways. For example, why are rates of severe depression so much higher today than say, during the Great (Economic) Depression of the 1930s, when adversity was seemingly so much more common? Both Seligman and Templeton believe the historical rise in depression is partly attributable to the growth in a mass media culture that is tilted toward gloom and pessimism. "There is no denying that ills exist," Templeton acknowledges, but in their zeal to cover pain and conflict, the news media often overlook stories of triumph, success, and human progress.

Ironically, this bias towards bad news has been magnified by the accelerating progress in mass communications. "There is nothing particularly new about this very human tendency to focus on bad news," Templeton notes. "What has changed is that today the opportunity to read or see or hear the news is unprecedented."

So is the opportunity to read or see or hear advertising messages that encourage people to focus on what they lack rather than what they have. This is significant, because Seligman says that much of the clinical depression he sees today "is a disorder of individual thwarting" that arises when people arrive at a sorrowful resignation that they'll never fulfill their most cherished hopes and dreams.

"Hopelessness is a disorder of the eye," Seligman told a recent academic conference in Philadelphia. And it is a disorder to which many psychologists have contributed. Indeed, Seligman believes the field of psychology has become too much like grunge rock: obsessed with despair, hopelessness, and depression. For example, a recent research survey by Ed Diener of the University of Illinois and David Myers of Hope College found that, over the last 30 years, research studies dealing with anger, anxiety, or depression have outnumbered studies examining joy, happiness, or life satisfaction by a ratio of 21 to 1.

"Modern psychology has become preoccupied with the negative side of life," Seligman says. "It has understood human functioning in a 'disease' model that is consumed with unresolved conflicts from childhood, with childhood trauma, and with viewing individuals as helpless victims of oppressive cultural and economic forces."

Failure Without Furniture

Seligman is not attempting to pooh-pooh human sorrow and suffering. Nor is he trying to delegitimize all "negative side" psychology. But Seligman says psychology's preoccupation with the morose has contributed to the rise of "an ideology of victimology" in our culture that sees "human beings as puppets of their environment" and offers little more than "coping skills" to those facing adversity.

This, Seligman says, is very different from the prevailing cultural mindset that existed earlier in this century. For example, he points out that "the emblematic children's book" in America used to be a story about overcoming adversity called *The Little Engine That Could.* Today, Seligman says, children are more apt to read books that seek to help them cope with negative events or books that offer a hollow "I am special" message that promotes what Seligman calls "unwarranted self-esteem." As a consequence, Seligman says, many Americans today grow up with a predisposition to abandon hope easily in the face of adversity and to pursue a life of narcissistic individualism that is often cut off from the social support networks and transcendent beliefs that previous generations found so valuable in overcoming life's inevitable hardships.

"Our grandparents had their relationship to God, their belief in a nation, their belief in a community—and they had large extended families," Seligman says. "This is the spiritual furniture that our parents and grandparents sat in when they failed."

Today, of course, many Americans suffer alone. And the more alone they are, the more likely they are to suffer. According to the National Institute for Heathcare Research (NIHR), depression is significantly more common among people living by themselves than among those residing in families. And it is more common still among "Eleanor Rigbys" living apart from a larger affinity group than among singles enmeshed in a community of supportive relationships.

Yet the solution to our problem isn't quite as simple as agreeing with Dean Martin that "everybody needs somebody sometimes." When it comes to depression, not all household arrangements and civic associations are equal. For example, never-married individuals living alone are actually less likely to experience depression than adults who

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have been married and divorced or who cohabitate. Children whose parents divorce are far more likely to experience a bout of severe depression than those from intact homes. Moreover, NIHR reports that people who belong to a local religious congregation are far less apt to experience depression than those who are non-religious. And a recent Duke University study shows that those who attend worship services also recover from bouts of depression far more quickly than do others.

A leading psychologist believes it is time his profession learned to cultivate certain virtues, such as courage, hope, optimism, and perseverance.

Linda George of Duke University says that "greater social support" explains only part of the relationship between frequent religious participation and better mental health. In other words, religious involvement appears to offer certain intrinsic benefits that are not typically available from participating in a bowling league, joining a garden club, or frequenting a pub, as the *Cheers* theme has it, "where everybody knows your name."

Sharing the Warmth

The rise in clinical depression, then, is directly related to the decline in civil society—most especially, the breakdown of family life and the demise of community-based organizations that promote civic virtue. While this means that efforts to reverse historical trends in depression must give attention to restoring these institutions, Seligman believes it is also critically important for the field of psychology to recognize and seek to cultivate certain virtues, such as courage, hope, optimism, perseverance, and honesty, that serve as "buffers against mental illness in vulnerable people."

Indeed, Seligman has devoted much of his professional life to showing that patterns of thinking do affect certain outcomes—which is why, for example, sports teams that "play to win" tend to experience greater success than those that play "not to lose." At the same time, Seligman is quick to say that pessimism and optimism are not fixed, inborn traits, but are instead "explanatory styles" or habitual ways in which people interpret and respond to failure. "One of the most significant findings in psychology in the last 20 years is that individuals can choose the way they think," Seligman says. "Habits of thinking need not be forever."

Accordingly, Seligman believes psychologists can and should devote themselves to helping individuals renew their minds and break out of self-destructive patterns of thinking and behaving. Rather than operating as detached technocrats content to merely measure human suffering or as morose pessimists who view human weakness as more "authentic" than human strengths, Seligman believes psychologists can and should work to help those who see the proverbial glass as half-empty to view it as half-full. And he says social scientists can promote virtues like resilience and tenacity without compromising their intellectual honesty, objectivity, or academic credibility.

"My vision for psychology and social science in the 21st century is that it will move from being muckraking and remedial to becoming a positive force," Seligman says. His vision is increasingly being embraced by others frustrated by the "I'm dysfunctional, you're dysfunctional" mindset of today's psychology. Indeed, a growing number of scholars (including those studying happiness and life satisfaction) are discovering that studying success may not only be more socially constructive than studying failure, but may also be more interesting.

"Researchers in the field of depression have focused understandably on trying to find out what makes people depressed," observes psychologist Lyn Abramson of the University of Wisconsin. "But it is equally important to try and understand what allows people to not become depressed in the face of adversity."

To illustrate, Abramson draws on an analogy to winter temperatures and home heating. "It's kind of obvious that a house could lose its warmth in sub-zero temperatures," she says. "What we need to understand is, why is it that some houses can stay warm despite the cold climate outside?"

Don't Worry, Be Happy?

Lest there be any doubt, Seligman isn't interested in promoting a simplistic, Pollyannaish outlook on life. Nor does he want the field of psychology to turn into the academic equivalent of a feel-good God & Country pep rally—like those say, that the 1988 Bush for President campaign staged to the tune of Bobby McFerrin's anthem, "Don't Worry, Be Happy."

But, Seligman says, psychologists should not be afraid to acknowledge the role that transcendent beliefs (in God, country, community, family, virtue) play in giving people hope and in helping them overcome adversity.

This last point is important. For much of our nation's "epidemic" in clinical depression is undoubtedly linked to nihilistic thinking. And it may very well be that one of the reasons we are witnessing a Great (Clinical) Depression in the midst of unprecedented peace and prosperity is because many Americans are gaining the whole world, but losing their soul.

William R. Mattox Jr. *is an award-winning writer who serves on the board of contributors at* USA Today.

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Does Faith Promote Happiness?

Sigmund Freud said they suffer from a form of sickness—an "obsessional neurosis" accompanied by guilt, repressed sexuality, and suppressed emotions. Former *Saturday Night Live* comedian Dana Carvey satirized them as frumpy, judgmental oddballs who find significance in the fact that "Santa" is an anagram of "Satan." But a number of recent research studies show that church ladies (and the men who worship alongside them) are some of the happiest and most hopeful people on the face of the earth. Now, isn't that special?

The correlation between faith and well-being can be seen both in surveys taken of the general public and in research on specific population groups. For example, a recent Gallup poll of Americans found that people with high religious involvement are twice as likely as those without to say that they are "very happy." Similarly, a literature review by psychologists Ed Diener and David Myers reported that religiousness is one of the best predictors of life satisfaction among the elderly.

David Larson, the president of the National Institute for Healthcare Research, says the link between faith and well-being is most obvious in studies that look at how people respond to adversity. For example, recently widowed women who attend church frequently report greater joy in their lives than those who are spiritually inactive. Churchgoing mothers of disabled children are less vulnerable to depression than their nonattending counterparts. And those with a devout faith are more likely than others to experience contentment in the midst of illness, marital hardships, or job-related problems. Larson believes these findings about hardship groups are especially important from a research standpoint. "Apparently, the link between faith and well-being isn't because happiness leads to religious involvement so much as religious involvement leads to happiness," he says.

So why exactly does religious involvement help church ladies and men lead such happy lives? Scholars have offered—and begun testing—a variety of possible explanations. Some believe part of the answer lies in the close relationships that people frequently cultivate as members of a religious group. Others point to the greater sense of meaning, purpose, and direction that people seem to gain from finding answers to life's deepest questions. Still others posit that religious worshippers in the midst of suffering often seem to derive comfort and hope from Biblical passages.

Whatever the case, as researchers seek to learn more about the interplay of faith and happiness, they are making some fascinating discoveries. For example, social psychologist Sheena Sethi-Iyengar of the Massachusetts Institute for Technology recently presented a study at an academic conference in Philadelphia that found that people who attend liberal congregations (which have fewer restrictions on personal behavior) are significantly less happy, hopeful, and optimistic than those who attend conservative congregations.

To further test this curious finding, Sethi-Iyengar and her colleagues conducted a content analysis of the sermons, hymns, prayers, and liturgies used by conservative, moderate, and liberal congregations. The messages found in orthodox religious services proved to be the most hopeful, while those in liberal services turned out to be the least hopeful.

Sethi-Iyengar cannot say for certain why religious conservatives are happiest, but one clue her study offers is that religious conservatives are far less apt to continually blame themselves for negative life events than are religious moderates and (especially) religious liberals. "This could be a sign of smug, self-righteousness—of 'holy rollers' feeling 'holier than thou,'" observes Larson. But given Sethi-Iyengar's content analysis, it is more likely that these findings are related in some way to religious teachings about sin, forgiveness, and being accepted by God. In other words, part of the reason for conservative churchgoers' high levels of contentment may be because it is better to have sinned and been forgiven than to wonder whether you have sinned at all.

Research shows that churchgoers tend to be happier and more hopeful than others, a far cry from Dana Carvey's sour and repressed "Church Lady" caricature.

Photo by Photofest

Needless to say, there are still many unanswered questions about the relationship between faith and happiness. But as researchers continue to probe, they are finding that religious involvement seems to benefit not only church ladies, but their family members as well. For example, a recent study by psychologist Lisa Miller of Columbia University found that young women raised in a home with a devoutly religious mother are 50 percent less likely than other young women to experience depression. And in cases where the daughter chooses to adopt her mother's faith, the likelihood of depression falls another 30 percent.

No one knows where all of this research will eventually lead. But this much, at least, seems clear. Instead of being representative of the average American church lady, Dana Carvey's *SNL* character looks more and more like a Freudian slip.

—William R. Mattox Jr.

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Civic Renewal *vs.* Moral Renewal

In two recent reports, elite opinion is divided over the proper way to reinvigorate civil society

By Don Eberly

Ever since the term "civil society" entered the public debate in the mid-1990s, even informed observers have been confused over what exactly it means and where it is leading us. Although the concept of civil society has had a rich history in Western thought, it had fallen out of use until very recently.

The boundaries of the term are flexible, but everyone acknowledges that at a minimum they encompass the entire web of voluntary associations that dot our social landscape: families, neighborhoods, civic associations, charitable enterprises, and local networks of a thousand kinds. For some of us, civil society also embraces our national public philosophy and our culture—in other words, all of those intangible values and beliefs upon which democracy rests, as well as those very tangible institutions in which they are cultivated and sustained.

The institutions of civil society are important, not only because they perform innumerable functions in countless locations every day, but also because they generate individual character and democratic habits. Through these institutions and networks, we become socialized as adult citizens, capable of being helpful, trustful, and respectful. Not surprisingly, many political theorists, most notably Alexis de Tocqueville, saw them as the basis of American greatness. If they weakened, he believed, American democracy would be imperiled.

No foreigner deserves more credit for having bequeathed to us the capacity to understand the roots and requirements of our own democracy than Tocqueville. The civil society debate of the 1990s cannot be understood apart from the basic questions and doubts that Tocqueville injected into our collective consciousness during the mid-19th century. Tocqueville was amazed by the power and vitality of American democracy, but was equally convinced that it contained seeds of its own corruption. Indeed, if there is any single concern that most animates today's civil society movement, it is the fear that American democracy is now in trouble.

But this discussion of civil society has its skeptics, who suspect the idea is vague and evasive, glossing over deeper and important ideological differences—perhaps intentionally. The Left has seen it as code for reaction, nostalgia, and conformity.

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Some on the Right have seen it as perhaps too unaffirming of free markets and of the hard work of dismantling the welfare state and re-moralizing the culture. Some critics complain that the entire civil society debate appears superficial and sentimental, offering inspiring themes but no concrete program for policymakers.

Perhaps the moment has arrived for a fresh evaluation. Two major national study groups have been laboring quietly over the past two years to address these issues of civil society and civic renewal. They have been meeting, debating, sifting through research and polling data, and trying to make sense of all of the issues that the civil society debate has brought to the forefront: the loss of trust, the decline of civic participation, the weakening of core social institutions, and the erosion of public morality.

These two commissions are led by heavyweights and loaded with ideologically diverse scholars and public advocates of civic revival. One is the Pew-funded National Commission on Civic Renewal, co-chaired by former U.S. education secretary William Bennett and former U.S. senator Sam Nunn and directed by William Galston, a former policy advisor to President Clinton and arguably the nation's leading civil-society intellectual. The other is the Council on Civil Society, sponsored jointly by the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Institute for American Values, and co-chaired by Jean Elshtain, the prolific author and commentator, and David Blankenhorn, who is quickly emerging as one of the nation's most creative and formidable cultural reformers.

Both commissions have just released reports, which are now circulating around the country and filling the nation's airwaves with debate. In many ways, the commissions are similar and address overlapping concerns. Each takes as its starting point what I call the Paradox of American Progress: the dismaying fact that the United States is the world's undisputed military, economic, and technological leader, yet also leads the world in many categories of social pathology.

Each report confronts the myth that economic progress assures widespread social progress. Each emphasizes the importance of renewing the family, especially curbing divorce and out-of-wedlock childbearing. Each strongly decries the state of America's media and entertainment culture. Each laments a possible decline in the civic spirit and its attendant virtues of civic trust and cooperation. Each speaks to the erosion of common moral norms and the rise of a corrupted form of individualism. And each offers a panoply of proposals for cleaning up the culture, fixing our institutions, and reinvigorating our public life.

The United States is the world's undisputed military, economic, and technological leader, yet also leads the world in many categories of social pathology.

Although there are many similarities in the reports, they reflect two diverging streams of argument in the civil society debate with significantly different priorities. One wing seems mostly concerned about the civic life of the nation, the other mostly about the nation's culture and moral underpinnings.

The first wing was drawn into the debate through the provocative work of Harvard scholar Robert Putnam, especially his famous essay

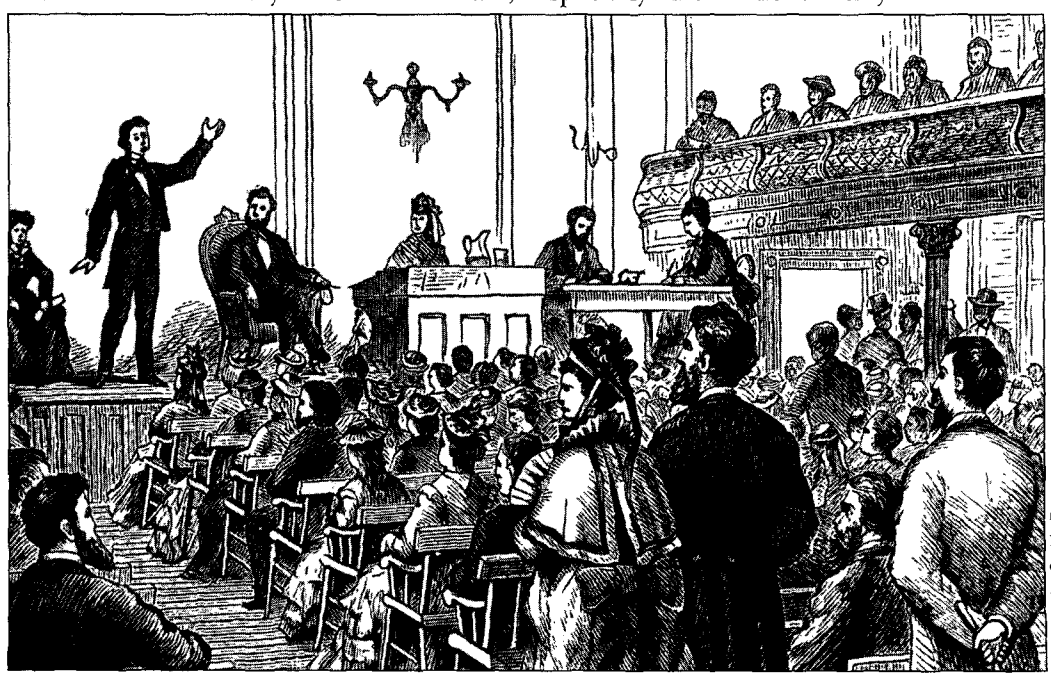

Illustration by Corbis-Bettmann

A tradition of town meetings exemplified America's robust civic participation in the nineteenth century (pictured). Is such civic-mindedness the essence of civil society, or does a reinvigoration of American public life require a moral renewal as well?

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"Bowling Alone," in which he questioned whether Americans are still civic joiners. Putnam offered evidence—since widely challenged—that Americans were withdrawing from many mainstream civic associations and were essentially becoming isolated. Although the National Commission on Civic Renewal report addressed a wide range of moral and cultural topics as well as civic ones, its title, "A Nation of Spectators: How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It," places it squarely in the Putnam camp.

This wing of the civil society movement, which I call civic revivalists, appears to be interested mostly in promoting public work by individuals. This usually means civic work in furtherance of fairly conventional ideological objectives. Putnam's original research, which focused on regional governments in Italy, found that public support for government was far stronger when surrounded by strong civic communities. In other words, this group wants civic recovery, among other things, to temper the public's recent repudiation of government activism by splicing in an emphasis on civic localism. The overriding objective, in any event, is promoting civic works, not inspiring a moral or cultural renewal.

One senses in this group a significant amount of discomfort with talk of morality, especially religion. Deliberations at the National Commission on Civic Renewal polarized repeatedly over the question of whether our society's deficits are mostly civic or mostly moral. Interestingly, although the final report was very balanced and nuanced, both William Bennett and Sam Nunn were decidedly in the cultural camp. A significant contingent of the civic restorationists responded with indignation over the possibility that the new civic conversation in America might include talk of moral values. Several indicated they would be laughed out of town if they returned home and reported being part of such a gathering.

The overriding goal of the "civic revivalists" is promoting civic works, not inspiring a moral or cultural renewal.

Civil society intellectuals of this school frequently go overboard in attempting to narrow the boundaries of debate around civic issues. I recently shared a platform with Benjamin Barber, a noted scholar from this camp, who stated emphatically, "What we don't need is moral character, but civic character. Our aim is democratic citizens; not the moral man." Barber added, "A society does not need moral truths; we need to live together."

Notice that he sought to equate moral truths with an implied threat of intolerance or moral majoritarianism. Barber's remarks are something of a bellwether of the philosophical impoverishment that still guides this debate in many quarters. His side allows that religion deserves a stronger voice in the public square, because to insist otherwise is to marginalize it, but it resists the notion that our democratic experiment is grounded in moral truth or transcendence of even the thinnest kind. What is sufficient for a democracy, they say, is civic character, or, in other words, a quickness to join. This is essentially civic secularism, and it largely misses the point.

If the public today has any preference for the basis of a re-evaluation of American society, it points decidedly in the direction of moral values. According to Daniel Yankelovich, "Public distress about the state of our social morality has reached nearly universal proportions: 87 percent of the public fear that something is fundamentally wrong with America's moral condition." Sixty-seven percent of Americans believe their country is in a long-term moral decline. By a margin of 59 percent to 27 percent, Americans believe that "lack of morality" is a greater problem in the United States than "lack of economic opportunity." At no point has a national poll identified deep public worries over a phenomenon one might term "civic disengagement."

The civic character argument is not unimportant: It represents a new point of potential convergence in our nation's public life. For example, politicians of both parties show a growing interest in empowering community-based charities. This is constructive as far as it goes, but it offers thin gruel for a nation hungry for deeper transformation. How, one must ask, do gentle appeals to civic-mindedness help curb teen pregnancy, confront the crack epidemic, stop playground shootings, slow the vulgarization of American culture, or reverse the complete de-moralization of our schools?

The public is quite clear on this. If some civic renewal advocates are dismayed by the discussion of moral reformation, many see the preaching against civic disengagement as inadequate and misplaced. The editors of my hometown newspaper scoffed at the Bennett-Nunn commission's suggestion that there's a failure of civic spirit, a response probably typical of many other small towns. Local folks in my central Pennsylvanian town, who like me are steeped in the gentle communitarianism of the Anabaptists or "plain people" of the area, simply don't understand what the fuss about civic decline is all about.

The habit of being "our brother's keeper" is deeply ingrained where I come from. An early morning fire recently destroyed the bedroom of a local farmhouse, leaving smoke damage throughout the entire dwelling. By sundown, 50 or so local volunteers—neighbors and relatives who showed up spontaneously, without prompting or moral ad-

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monishments by outsiders—had rid the house of every trace of smoke damage.

These folks would hoot at the thought that we Americans lack civic commitment. What really leaves them speechless is the sense of powerlessness they feel as they watch the bottom fall out of the nation's moral life. As inconceivable as it is for these folks to not show up when the tragedy of fire or flood strikes, so, too, is the idea that our society would tolerate the loss of innocence in an increasingly barbaric culture, wink at the problem of family collapse, and watch diffidently as unmarried mothers give birth to more than one third of American children. How, they ask, can national leaders think that the civic spirit can be recaptured when we refuse to cultivate conscience among the young, who commit remorseless violence in growing numbers. Most importantly, they wonder how a nation's leadership can expect a nation to survive all of this by placing its faith in prosperity and civic participation alone.

The Council on Civil Society, taking this concern essentially as its starting point, stated its challenge boldly in the report's title: "A Call to Civil Society: Why Democracy Needs Moral Truths." "Our main challenge," it stated, "is to rediscover the existence of transmittable moral truth." Gently chiding those who argue that all we need is to spend more time volunteering, the report spotlighted "a deeper problem." American civic institutions are declining, it said, "because the moral ideas that fueled and formed them are losing their power to shape our behavior and unite us." "This weakening," it continued, "is closely connected to a range of social problems, from listless voting patterns to fragmenting families, from the coarsening of popular culture to expanding economic inequality."

The Council on Civil Society also issued a clarion call for civic renewal, but it concluded that America's civic crisis is primarily philosophical and moral. "Why would anyone want to participate in civic life in the first place? Why work to relieve suffering or achieve justice? Why tolerate dissent, why seek to persuade rather than overpower and rule? Even the most elementary civic act, such as voting, cannot be explained merely in terms of rational self-interest." The report argued that "the qualities necessary for self-governance are the results of certain moral ideas about the human person and the nature of the good life," and when the moral grounds of our existence is ignored, "all that is left is power."

A national consensus is beginning to emerge on certain key public concerns such as family disintegration and out-of-wedlock childbearing. Moreover, notwithstanding the reservations of some, religion is likely to have a stronger voice in the public square, both as a legitimate wellspring of personal values and as perhaps the richest source of renewed social capital in communities. It means that civil society is going to be a powerful place for people to gather and work, in many cases transcending politics and ideology.

Most will rejoice to know that a vast majority of Americans now acknowledge that government, and especially the central government, may never again be embraced as the engine that drives American progress. In the arena of civil society, a far more dynamic form of citizenship is being reborn, not one that concerns itself exclusively with casting a vote so that action can be taken in some distant legislature, but one which concerns itself with the improvement of living conditions in our neighborhoods.

The people long for relationships that last, human exchange that is trustworthy, institutions that function, and civic communities that rely on life-enhancing values.

In political terms, this means that a public philosophy is emerging that attempts to summon Americans toward greater and higher purposes than are usually invoked by simple appeals to self-interest and the economic bottom line. The values of citizenship, sacrifice, service to others, and the ethic of cooperation will once more gain strength.

The emergence of civil society as a framework for progress means that simplistic reliance on either the state or the market as mechanisms for social improvement will give way to deepening interest in creative ways to expand the social sector. The people long for relationships that last, human exchange that is trustworthy, institutions that function, and civic communities that rely firmly on life-enhancing values.

The stage is set for a far more promising and perhaps unexpected debate. That debate will center on the moral versus civic requirements of American citizenship. Was our constitution written for a moral and religious people, or was that merely a quaint sentiment which dominated during less enlightened times when we had fewer social protections against the risk of bad behavior? Will the recovery of civic character get us through the social storm, or will the renewal of our democratic experiment require more? This, it seems, is the question.

Don Eberly *is the author or editor of four books on civil society and culture, including the forthcoming* America's Promise: Civil Society and the Renewal of American Culture *(Rowman and Littlefield). He directs the Civil Society Project, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and played a role in both the Council on Civil Society and National Commission on Civic Renewal.*

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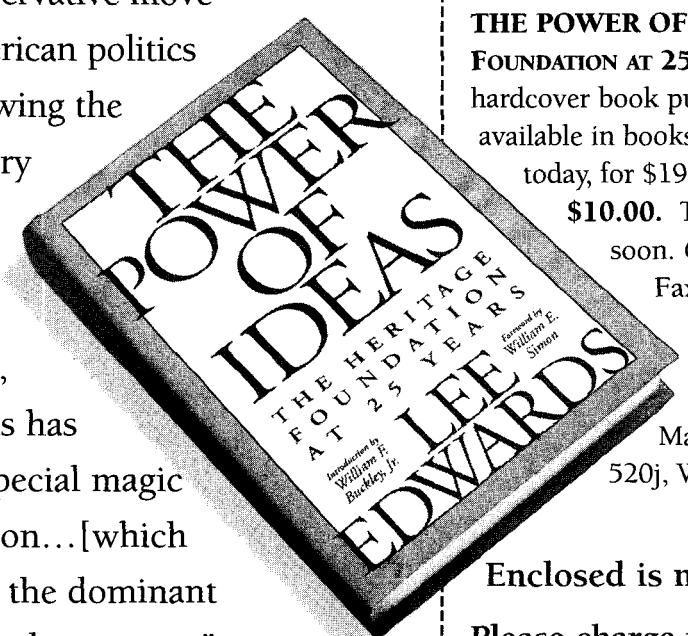

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Introduction by William F. Buckley Jr. & Foreword by William E. Simon

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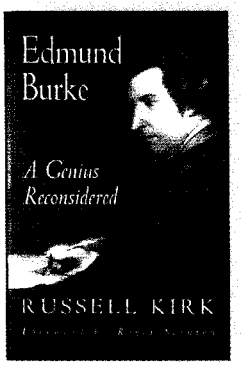

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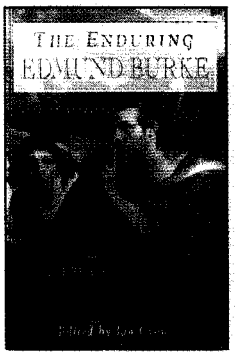

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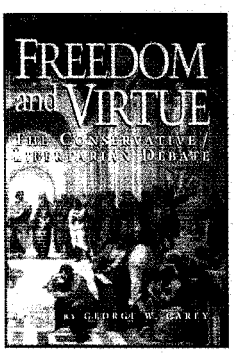

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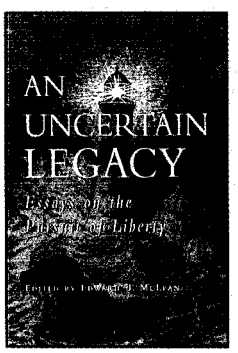

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